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MIDSHIPMAN JACK

BY CHARLES LEDYARD NORTON

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"'SO YOU'RE THE BOY I'VE BEEN GETTING ORDERS FROM THE DEPARTMENT ABOUT.'"

MIDSHIPMAN JACK

BY

CHARLES LEDYARD NORTON

Author of "Jack Benson's Log," "A Medal of Honor Man," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

GEORGE GIBBS

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MIDSHIPMAN JACK

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More than twelve months have passed since Jack Benson, then a "First Class Boy" in the Navy, stood on the quarter-deck of the gunboat "Otter" in Port Royal Harbor while his commanding officer pinned the Naval Medal of Honor upon his breast. The story of the two years' service that led up to this distinction and his appointment as Acting Midshipman in the Naval Academy, is told in "Jack Benson's Log" and "A Medal of Honor Man," the opening volumes of this series.

Jack now comes forward again in the uniform of a Yankee midshipman, to tell the story of his brief Academic career and of his term of service with the Gulf squadron under Rear Admiral Farragut.

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MIDSHIPMAN JACK.

CHAPTER I.

FAREWELL THE "OTTER": "PALMA" AHOY!

It seems hardly fair, in continuing my story, to assume that anybody will remember what happened in the last chapter of the preceding volume. I am sure I do not expect any one to do so. But it is manifestly impossible to tell it all over again here, so I will just say that on a certain afternoon in April, 1863, I, Jack Benson, first-class boy on board the United States gunboat, "Otter," stood up before all my shipmates, and heard the order read appointing me an Acting Midshipman, and sending me to Newport for examination and entrance as far up on the list of cadets as I could manage to pass.

My head was in a whirl with the excitement and the cheers, and I hardly knew which way to turn, feeling very awkward now that my sailor-boy's rig covered a junior officer amidst the gold lace and side arms of the quarter-deck.

Captain Ross saw my dilemma and said, with the instant tact and consideration that always distinguished him: "Now then, Jack, I'm sorry to lose you, but the sooner you get away, the better. Go for'ard and pack your kit, or what you want of it, and report at the starboard gangway." He motioned me to go, and I heard him say, "Order my gig, Mr. Dinsmore," addressing the officer on watch.

The boatswain piped, and the men were casting off the falls as I hurried along the waist and dived down the main-hatch. I hardly dared look to the right or left, though I was hammered on the back, and congratulated by my shipmates with rough heartiness, as I made my way among them.

We boys kept our dunnage stowed away up "in the eyes of her," and I hauled out my bag and emptied its contents on deck, securing only a certain valued little package and my thick pea-jacket, which I knew I should need on the voyage north. For the rest, my companions might divide the sailor-boy's outfit among them, as I had no further use for it.

This done, I looked about me. My fellow "boys," to the number of a dozen or so, stood around in the dim light of the forepeak. They were, it seemed to me, ominously silent. I think I was fairly well liked among them, considering the circumstances, but I had ample evidence that I was not lacking enemies for all that, and now that I was going away in such an extraordinary blaze of glory, it was not in human

nature for those who were left behind to be over enthusiastic at my good fortune.

When I had finished my preparations, one and another came forward and offered me their hands and said good-by, and then the others followed, and the first thing I knew something came up in my throat, and I tried to say a word, but couldn't, and so bolted for the fore-hatch with unmannerly haste, leaving my mates engaged in a free fight over the outfit which I had abandoned.

There was no backwardness on the part of my elders before the mast, with whom I had very generally been a favorite. Two of them who had been with me in the fight on Redman's River seized me by the arms as I came up the ladder, and swung me up on their shoulders, tramping off to the starboard gangway where the side was already manned in anticipation of the captain's appearance. All the way I had a sort of ovation, until I was deposited at the gangway itself.

Rocking on the gentle swell alongside was the gig, with her gleaming brass rowlocks, six smart bluejackets with their oars apeak, and little Billy Acres with the boat-hook forward bearing her off from the ship's side as I myself had done many a time in days gone by.

Jumping down from the broad shoulders of my captors and shaking hands indiscriminately with all the big brown fists that I could get hold of, I broke

away at last amid a chorus of good-bys and dropped down into the bow of the gig from one of the stanchions.

"Hand over that boat-hook, Billy," said I, shoving little Acres forcibly down beside the bow oarsman and taking my accustomed place.

The coxswain aft began to say something to me, but at this moment the boatswain ordered attention, and the little nautical parade of manning the side was gone through with due form, for when Captain Ross ordered his gig on a state occasion, he became a nautical martinet, and all the ceremonies of naval etiquette were duly observed.

"Where's Benson?" he asked, taking his seat at the stern.

"Gone for'ard, sir," said the coxswain shortly.

Ross glanced toward the bow, and seeing me at my regular post, took in the situation at once and ordered me to shove off. Oars were let fall, and the light gig fairly jumped as six broad blades caught the water.

"'Vast pulling," ordered the coxswain at a hint from Ross, as soon as we fairly had way on.

"Lay aft here, Benson," said Captain Ross, and stepping from thwart to thwart over the oars I obeyed and sat down beside him on the cushions of his own gig.

A hundred "Otters" swarmed up into the rigging and perched along the hammock nettings to give us

a farewell cheer, and Ross bade me stand up and raise my cap to them as we dashed away toward the flagship to get the necessary orders for my passage north.

That was the last that I ever saw of the little "Otter." Though she kept up her reputation to the very end, took a hand in various fights big and little, and in the capture of sundry other blockade-runners, before she finally went out of commission, was condemned by a board of survey, and ended her career honorably in the coal trade, having paid for herself several times over in prizes. I confess to secret rejoicing when I read years after that she parted her hawser one wild night off Nantucket shoals, and without a soul on board went reeling out into the Atlantic and was never heard of more.

In a few minutes we rounded to under the big guns of the "Wabash," and bidding me follow him, Captain Ross went up the side, the marine on duty presenting arms, with a smart rattle of his piece which was so grateful in my ears that I couldn't resist touching my cap in acknowledgment, though the salute was not meant for me. Nobody but the marine himself saw me, and though he looked daggers of offended dignity, he said nothing, and we passed on.

Ross took me to the flag-lieutenant, and the necessary discharge and transfers were quickly made out. The Admiral's personal signature was required for

final transfer, and the flag-lieutenant went aft with the papers in his hand.

He returned presently: "The old gentleman is taking his 'constitutional' on deck, Captain. He wants to see you."

So Ross went up the after companion and joined the Admiral as he passed back and forth.

"Come up here, Benson," Ross called presently. And I found myself in the presence of a big handsome man in an undress uniform coat and immaculate white duck trousers, whom I had heretofore seen only from the infinite distance that separates forecastle from quarter-deck.

Ross presented me in due form, and the Admiral shook hands. "So you're the boy that I've been getting orders from the department about, are you? You've been making us a deal of trouble for a youngster. I hear very good accounts of you though, and you've something on your breast there that not many of us old fellows can ever hope to win."

He touched my medal as he spoke, turning it over to examine it more closely.

"That must have been a very pretty little scrimmage down the coast there. Lieutenant Morris told me all about it. Said you fought the cutter like an old man-o'-war's man. Well, good luck to you. 'Tisn't likely you'll have many more chances to distinguish yourself like that. But there's no telling in these times. Good-by. — By the way, Ross, your

old friend, the 'Palma,' is back here again. Something went adrift in the engine-room, and Cayvan brought her back under sail."

This was news to us, but we found that she had anchored just inside the bar and out of sight from our berth. Lieutenant Blake had my papers ready when we returned to his official quarters, and glancing at my transportation order, I saw with some surprise that it gave me passage and subsistence on the very ship of which we had just spoken.

This was luck indeed. I should not have to wait for a chance ship, and I should have acquaintances on board in the person of Cayvan and his prize crew, not to mention my old friend Captain Ridgeway, R. N.

A despatch boat was going down to her before sunset, so I bade a grateful farewell to my old commander and watched the gig pull back to the "Otter," with a very considerable touch of homesickness at the bottom of my heart.

In the course of half an hour I was set on board of the despatch boat, and we ran down to where the "Palma" lay rolling uneasily just within the bar. There was too much sea on to lay alongside, so mails, despatches, and myself were bundled into the yawl, and we went plunging and curveting under the "Palma's" counter and were hoisted aboard.

Of course, Cayvan had heard nothing of my promotion and other honors. These had all come to

pass since he left the "Otter." So I had to show him my papers and tell him the whole story in explanation of my presence in this new character.

"That's all right, old man," he said heartily, when I had finished; "shake hands on it. Welcome to the noble brotherhood of officers. You shall be Acting Assistant Prize Master on the 'Palma.' There isn't any such grade in the service that I know of, but no matter. I'll lend you an officer's cap, and we'll stand watch and watch as if the whole thing was perfectly regular."

Of course I agreed to this cheerfully, and although the standing watch and watch was not very strictly carried out, we managed to get a good deal of satisfaction out of our official relation, and of course I was entitled to sit at the saloon table, which was very nice after so many months of mess-cloths on deck.

By the time this was settled we had got our anchor aboard, and crossed the tossing bar in the last light of the west, pointing a little to north of east so as to get a safe offing. Hatteras was very kind to us this time, and we slipped by in the darkness with nothing more than a tolerably heavy swell.

Readers who have followed this story will remember perhaps that the "Palma" was a famous blockade-runner captured by the "Otter" and sent North for adjudication under charge of Ensign Cayvan (who

was then hardly recovered from a severe wound) and a well-armed prize crew of twelve men. The blockader's crew numbered perhaps sixty, — stokers, stewards, etc., all told, — and there was always to be borne in mind the possible danger of an attempt on their part to recapture the ship.

What was my surprise on going below to be greeted first by my little canine friend Wag, who expressed in dog fashion the keenest delight at meeting me again, and secondly, by my other friend, Captain Ridgeway, R. N., formerly of the "Palma," and now a semi-captive on board his own ship. He recognized me instantly this time.

"Why, blessed if it ain't my little 'prisoner-of-war' again, and Cayvan tells me you're a middy now. Sit down, my lad, sit down. Hi, steward! bring Mr. Benson some supper. Bless me, I keep forgetting I'm not captain of this ship yet."

I was hungry enough by this time, and fell to with great seriousness, listening the while to the genial blockade-runner's talk.

Wag came and sat beside me and gratefully accepted an occasional fragment of pilot bread, while I wondered at his presence on board, and longed but dared not ask if the young ladies, his mistresses, were on board too.

But Captain Ridgeway, R. N., never let on that he suspected what was in my mind, and after I had finished supper, I lost no time in seeking Cayvan,

who would not leave the bridge until he was satisfied that we were clear of the shoals.

After innocently asking him where away he made Cape Fear and one or two other professional questions, I remarked casually upon the presence of Wag on board and asked if he had heard anything of the young ladies.

"Well, I should say so. I've got to take 'em North."

"You don't seem pleased at the prospect."

"No, I'm not. Two pretty young women in a ship with near seventy ruffians. What if anything should happen? I'm glad they're not my sisters."

"How did it happen?"

"Why, you see after I had landed Morris and the rest of my invalids at Hampton Roads, I started for New York again, and broke down about a hundred miles north of the Virginia capes. Then we caught a bit of an offshore breeze that drove us five hundred miles out to sea before it was done with us. It has taken us all this time to work back under sail. The 'Monterey' picked us up twenty miles out and towed us in to the bar, that being the nearest place where we could anchor and get the engine patched up. That was yesterday, and as ill luck would have it, a Johnny Bull had tried to run out of Charleston the night before and got pretty well hammered before our fellows stopped him. All hands had to be

taken off before she sank, and who should be among them but those two girls again, with their black duenna and the pup. Well, they've had enough of running the gauntlet of the Yankee fleet, and they begged so hard to be allowed to go North on the 'Palma,' that old Dupont gave in. He sent all the rest of the passengers back to Charleston, but they were not pretty girls. If they had been, I suppose he'd have let them come too. They always do anything pretty girls ask 'em to."

Who Mr. Cayvan meant by his indefinite "they" is not even yet wholly clear to my mind. Probably he included all masculine creation, and the experience of a tolerably long life leads me to think that he was not very much out.

At any rate, when I relieved him at eight bells and began my first tour of duty on watch, I was very exultant over the consciousness of the fact that two very lovely beings were below decks, and that I, even I, Jack Benson, was for the time being responsible for their safety.

Up and down the narrow bridge I walked, and the novelty of it made the time pass quickly enough. We were keeping as near the coast as was safe in order to be within reach of the offshore blockading squadron in case of need. We carried the ordinary side-lights of commerce; but blockade-runners could easily do that, too, if they chose. So every gunboat that sighted us gave chase, unless they were so far

away that we could afford to pretend not to see them.

I was relieved at four o'clock and slept like a sailor-boy till ten in the forenoon in the unaccustomed luxury of the cabin berth, which had been assigned me by Cayvan's direction.

CHAPTER II.

TWO DANGEROUS REBELS.

I was never very much given to prinking, but I must admit that I took considerable pains with my toilet before going on deck on this particular morning. To be sure, there was not much that I could do. But when I went up the companion I was as immaculate a young sailor as ever wore Jacky's togs surmounted by an officer's cap. After some reflection, I decided that as this was not an occasion of state and ceremony, it would be good form not to wear my medal, so I pinned it carefully inside my pea-jacket before making my appearance.

The main cabin was empty. Of course the regular breakfast was long since over, so I went on deck by a stair which led through a common booby-hatch, and had hardly set foot on deck, when Wag flew at me with a joyous yelp of recognition. With what I flatter myself evinced great presence of mind, I lifted the little fellow in my arms, and stood caressing him a moment, before turning to see if any one was watching me.

When I did turn, it was a very limp and listless group that met my eyes, — an ashen-hued and de-

spondent duenna, and two pitiably pale white figures reclining under the lee of the weather bulwarks, wrapped in shawls, provided with cushions, and evidently in the lowest depths of sea-going misery.

It had not even occurred to me the night before that the reason why they were not visible, was that they were seasick. So accustomed was I to rolling and tossing in the forepeak of the "Otter," that the little antics of a side-wheeler seemed to me of no account whatever.

This was not by any means the kind of meeting that I had counted upon. I might have spared myself the elaborate toilet that I had made. Evidently a retreat in good order was the thing to effect. So putting Wag down on the deck, I slipped around the leeward side of the companion hatch, and attempted to go forward without disturbing the ladies.

But Wag was not to be put off in any such fashion. So he frisked over to where his mistress lay and licked her hand. After which he galloped back to me, and seizing the bottom of my trousers, pulled for all he was worth, as if he would say: "Look here, Jack, here are Edith and Helen. Don't you remember them?"

He made such a rumpus that I had perforce to take him up in my arms again to keep him from wrecking the lower story of my trousers; and, behold, when I turned toward the weather rail again, a marked change had taken place. Miss Edith was

sitting up with just a little tinge of color coming back into her cheeks, and she was reaching over to arouse her cousin.

"Look, Helen," she said, — they were to windward of me, you see, and I could hear every word, though doubtless they thought I could not do so. "Look, Helen, I do believe that's our Yankee sailor-boy, and he has got Wag."

Miss Helen aroused herself at this, and they motioned to me that I should bring them the dog. So I walked across the deck, and for the second time had the happiness of placing little Wag in his mistress' arms.

Of course, when I found myself right before them, I could do no less than doff my cap and ask after their respective healths and how were my mortal foes, their brothers, and so presently Miss Helen said: —

"Mr. Benson, won't you sit down, please? It makes me seasick to see you balancing there."

I had been standing before them, unconsciously swaying, sailor fashion, as the vessel rolled, but at this I sat down on the sunny deck, nothing loath, you may be sure, in front of these very dangerous but very fascinating Rebels.

They had been distressingly seasick ever since their second failure to run the blockade, and had been literally carried on deck that morning by their escort, Captain Ridgeway. But the fresh sea air was already doing wonders toward restoring them, and

as we had lots to talk about I totally forgot that I hadn't had any breakfast till the after watch rang eight bells, reminding me that it was my duty to relieve the bridge.

"Nice Acting Assistant Prize Master you are!" was Cayvan's only comment, as he went below, leaving me temporarily in charge of the deck. He had planned that one or the other of us two should be on duty continuously during the night watches and at such times as seemed best during the day. The men-o'-war's men were divided into regular watches, half of them to be on deck at a time, and two of these, each with a brace of navy Colts in his belt, were habitually stationed on the bridge at all hours. As the ship was worked by her old crew, our fellows had nothing to do but take their regular turns at guard duty.

Captain Ridgeway and his first and second officers had given their paroles that they would not attempt to escape, but the two mates were very different persons from their captain, and neither Cayvan nor I had even a little bit of confidence in their good faith.

Cayvan had a line stretched across the deck ten feet for'ard of the bridge, and this was popularly known as the "dead line." None of the regular crew were allowed abaft of it without special orders. Similar precautions were taken about the engine-room and stoke-hole, and Cayvan, who was a capital revolver shot, had in an off-hand way sent a bullet

uncomfortably near a man who rather defiantly passed the dead line without leave.

"Next one that tries that I'll shoot to hit," Cayvan remarked, as the watch on deck drew threateningly together and scowled at him.

During the voyage under sail, after having been carried out to sea, all hands had been so anxious to make a port that the mutinous spirit did not flourish, but now that the "teakettle" was boiling, the possibilities of a recapture again became alluring to the more adventurous spirits.

The first hint that we had of this came from Aunt Leah, the black duenna of our fair passengers. She had come to look upon me with some degree of toleration since she had seen for herself that some Yankees at least were not so bad as her imagination had pictured. She waylaid me so suddenly in one of the dimly lighted passageways on the second night out that my hair fairly stood on end with fright for an instant, as the voice that addressed me seemed to come from a pair of eyes that were alone visible, her black face and the rest of her person being entirely concealed by the darkness.

The ship's cooks, it appeared, were Bermuda darkies and had naturally been more or less attentive to the only colored lady on board. Leah was not altogether destitute of the arts of coquetry though she was pretty well on toward the meridian of life, and had managed so successfully that both the cooks

aforesaid had become her devoted slaves, Britons though they were, before we had been twenty-four hours at sea.

She waylaid me, as I have said, plucking me by the sleeve. "See yer, Mars Jack, come in yer," and she forcibly pulled me into a vacant stateroom. "Mars Jack, dey's dark doings yonder," and she jerked her turbaned head toward the bow.

"What do you mean, auntie?"

"I mean what I says; dey's dark doings, and you 'uns done better watch out."

"We'll do that anyhow, auntie; but what have you heard?"

And after a little coaxing, and promises never to tell the young ladies, it came out that Leah's two admirers had separately confided to her that an attempt was to be made to seize the ship on the third night out.

"I dun doan't believe Sam when he tole me fust off," said Leah; "but when Lish dun tole me de same story, I says to myself, seys I, Leah, you go tell Mars Jack."

Now, of course, Leah had no personal objection to having the ship seized by the English crew, for that would mean a continuation of their voyage to England. But she had the sense to know that such seizure meant unheard-of peril for her mistresses, and she preferred to take the chances under law and order as represented by the Stars and Stripes and a crew of Uncle Sam's blue-jackets.

I reassured her as well as I could, and making her promise to keep me informed of anything farther, I reported to Cayvan, who was on watch.

"Looks squally," he said, and after some moments of silent reflection, "Wonder if Ridgeway is in it? I don't think so. He's a gentleman. I'll interview him to-morrow. No danger to-night — too many gunboats along here."

We had now turned Hatteras shoals, having run about three hundred miles in the twenty-four hours out of Port Royal, and at that rate we should be nearly off the Delaware capes by the following night.

I offered to keep Cayvan company on the bridge, but he sent me to take my watch below. I relieved him at four o'clock, and he left me alone rather reluctantly, saying that there was something to pay forward, and he had doubled the bridge guard.

As he was giving me my instructions, the men of the relief watch came up the ladder to take the places of those already there, and I was presently left alone except for my armed Jackies at the ends of the bridge. Cautioning them to keep wide awake, I took my station amidships, or walked back and forth the length of the bridge.

It is very important that there shall be no gleam of light forward of the lookout, for ever so slight a twinkle near at hand robs the eye of half its power to see anything ahead. For this reason the red and green side-lights were set well abaft the bridge

and the head-light was carefully screened, but Cayvan had caused a large reflector lantern to be arranged so that by simply lifting a bit of canvas a flood of light could be thrown upon the forecastle.

Cayvan's suspicions had aroused my own, and I peered into the dark spaces forward with nerves in a state of considerable tension. It certainly seemed to me that there were more figures moving about in the shadows than could rightly be accounted for.

After hailing the forecastle and getting no answer, I was on the point of turning on the light when one of my guards sung out, "Ship on port bow, sir."

I made her out in a moment, a dark heaving mass under the starlit sky. She was heading directly across our course, and just as I rang to slow down the engines a blank shot was fired for us to heave to.

If any plot was hatching in the forecastle, no more was heard of it then, for by the time that we had satisfied the cruiser of our character, day was dawning in the east, and we steamed away northward. One more night of watchfulness, and please heaven we would let go our anchor under the guns of the harbor forts at New York.

CHAPTER III.

"ON HONOR."

AUNT LEAH confessed, when next I met her, that plans had been suddenly changed, and that a rush had only been prevented by the timely challenge of our gunboat. Sunrise found us abreast of the Virginia capes, and with good luck we ought to raise the Jersey coast before nightfall.

Cayvan had taken occasion to say to me the day before in a fatherly way, that I was half disposed to resent, seeing that he was not more than two years my senior, "Look here, old man, they're awful nice girls, those two."

I assented guardedly.

"You and I have got something more serious to attend to."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You know well enough."

"I don't, then."

"Well," said Cayvan, "I'd like nothing better than to spend my whole watch on deck with them; and, if anything, you're harder hit than I am."

I could not deny the charge altogether; but I did

deny most emphatically that I had permitted inclination to interfere with duty.

"Well, don't let's," was his answer; and we shook hands on it when he relieved me for the morning watch.

All the same, I found many an opportunity during that voyage to sit on a convenient cotton bale, with Wag beside me, and watch these two little Rebels knit socks, which they frankly declared were for their Southern soldier boys, and which I threatened to have confiscated as soon as we reached New York.

It was in vain that I begged for a tiny knot of yarn as a keepsake: that yarn was sacred to the South down to the very last shred. But my four-footed friend, Wag, having no doubt overheard this conversation, came to my aid. For some reason, clear, no doubt, to his canine intelligence, the little terrier took a great liking to me. Dogs have a fellow-feeling for us humans, sometimes; or, perhaps, he remembered how I had once rescued him from a watery grave. At all events, I was in the saloon on this particular day, working out the ship's position after the regular meridian observation, when I was aware of two small yellow paws and a patch of something white upon my knee. Looking down, I saw Wag holding something like a crumpled pocket handkerchief in his teeth. He was waving his tail with great energy, and something in his bright little eyes seemed to say: "There now, just see what I've

brought you. I know you'll like it." He laid the little bunch of white upon my knee, and as I stooped to pat him and tell him he was a good dog, I caught a faint whiff of unaccustomed fragrance from somewhere.

Wag trotted demurely away, leaving me in the act of making a closer examination, and when I presently went on deck he was sitting very alert and upright at his mistresses' feet.

"Leah," one of the girls was saying, just at this moment, "go fetch me a handkerchief; I must have left mine in my room."

I was in mortal terror lest Wag should insist upon nosing out the handkerchief in the pocket of my reefer, convicting me of petty larceny on the spot; but he didn't, and there the dainty keepsake remained, carefully treasured for many a long day.

Neither Cayvan nor I had any reason to complain of each other for neglect of duty after this, and as the sun sank behind the distant Jersey shore, and we saw once more the gleam of friendly lighthouses, it seemed out of the question that our crew would dare to venture upon a stroke for liberty.

No precautions that we could think of were overlooked, and before lights were set Cayvan sent a guard for the two mates and ordered them into their rooms, first carefully searching them for concealed weapons. They demurred a little at this, but Cayvan's orders were backed up by four armed blue-

jackets, and the mates were securely locked in on their respective sides of the cabin.

Captain Ridgeway had witnessed this proceeding from a seat at the saloon table, and so it seems had the two young ladies, though we did not know this at the time. But presently, as I went on deck and stood for a moment by the quarter-rail looking up to windward, I heard a gentle rustle of skirts, and two little hands clasped a belaying pin at my side as the ship rolled to leeward.

I recognized Miss Edith, as she whispered, "What's the matter, Mr. Benson?"

"Nothing."

"Oh yes, there is. We saw you lock up those two horrid mates, and Captain Ridgeway won't tell us. *Please*, what is the matter?"

"Nothing at all — really — ask Cayvan."

"But I don't know Mr. Cayvan as well as I do you," and with that she let go the belaying pin and laid one hand on my arm, and I thought she was going to cry.

What could a simple sailor-boy do, under the circumstances, but make a clean breast of the whole matter. Anyway, that's what I did, and it turned out afterward that Miss Helen had successfully worked the same game on my superior officer.

At all events, they were both warned not to be alarmed if they heard a row in the night. We both assured them that we were masters of the situation,

and could certainly hold the ship against any attempted mutiny. And we both said many other things about our security which, in a measure, served to allay their fears.

There was only one passage, a narrow one, that led forward from the after saloon, and as soon as night fell Cayvan had three cotton bales piled one on top of the other, nearly filling this passageway up to the ceiling.

Captain Ridgeway was still reading at the saloon table, or, at least, pretending to read, when Cayvan passed to go on deck. Looking up nervously once or twice, he apparently determined suddenly to stand it no longer.

"Mr. Cayvan," he cried, "may I see you a moment?"

"Certainly."

"You have locked in both my officers. May I ask why you don't lock me in too?"

"Captain Ridgeway," said Cayvan, and he looked him straight in the eyes, "*you* are an officer in the British Navy," and he turned on his heel without another word and went on deck.

One of the most extraordinary instances of British conservatism that I know of, is the presistency with which their marine architects put the steering wheel away aft where the helmsman cannot possibly see whether he is running down the broadside of a continent or merely another ship. Nevertheless, the

plan proved useful for us on board the "Palma," as will hereafter be seen.

As soon as it was fairly dark, Cayvan sent me with his compliments to Captain Ridgeway, requesting his presence on the bridge. The Englishman stopped only to throw on his storm coat, and then hurried forward.

"Captain," said Cayvan, "you were kind enough to offer to take your watch when we first began this voyage, but I was then advised not to accept your offer. Will you renew it now?"

Ridgeway hesitated, but after a moment said, "Yes, I will."

"Thanks. I leave you in charge of the bridge, and I advise you to uncover the lantern and let your men see that you are here, and no one else."

"Very good, sir."

Then as Cayvan was about going down the ladder, Ridgeway spoke again, "Mr. Cayvan."

"Yes."

"Those young ladies were placed in my charge, you know."

"Yes, I know. Come aft as soon as you like, when they make their break. Probably nobody will stop you."

"Very good, sir." And we saw him open the lantern and begin walking back and forth in its rays.

Cayvan, in the meantime, relieved the man at the wheel, locked him below, and put trusty blue-jackets in his place.

"If those fellows try it on," Cayvan said to me in the afternoon, "there is no earthly use in our trying to hold the bridge; but thanks to the Johnny Bull who designed this ship, the only steering wheel is right on top of the rudder post, and we can hold that against all England. Now I am going to ask Captain Ridgeway to take the bridge. They won't hurt him, and he won't hurt them. But he'll con the ship while she has steerageway, and then — well, I shan't be surprised if he comes aft and helps us."

"How about the stokers and engineers?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know about the engineers, but when the stokers make a rush for the ladders, as they will when the signal's given, something is going to break down. The main part of the crew will naturally try to capture the deck with a rush, and we'll pepper them well. Two of our men have lost revolvers. I suppose they have been stolen by some of those fellows, and will be used against us, but I don't believe they can stand our fire. Probably they have arranged to keep the 'teakettle' going so as to run for an offing as soon as they get control. But if not, we'll set the spanker and keep her head to the sea."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"You will have to stay below and defend the after saloon, including, of course, our two little Rebels. I am afraid to spare you more than one blue-jacket to help, but the two of you ought to hold that narrow passageway against anything."

"Very good, sir," said I, coming to attention and saluting. "When shall I go on duty?"

"The sooner, the better."

So calling the man who had been ordered to report to me, we went below, leaving the rest of our fellows hauling some of the deck-load cotton bales by main force and arranging them clear across the deck on both sides of the after companion, thus protecting the wheel with a perfectly bullet-proof breastwork.

After this, for two hours, everything was quiet. Cayvan stood by the wheel, watching the coast lights and listening to the throb of the engine. Once there came a hail from the bridge.

"Port! hard aport! light ahead!"

"Port it is, sir," shouted Cayvan in reply, springing to the wheel and helping whirl it over.

In another moment, a great steamer rushed by us bound South, her side-light gleaming red for an instant over our low quarter, and the long row of her cabin ports glowing like a string of Japanese lanterns.

"Steady, as you were," came from the bridge in Ridgeway's voice.

"Steady, sir," answered Cayvan, and we were on our course again.

The mutineers must have suspected, from the non-appearance of the mates, that we were more or less forewarned, but they probably did not realize the

completeness of our preparations. Captain Ridgeway told us afterward that they had sent a deputation to him while he was alone on the bridge, telling him respectfully enough to stay where he was, and he wouldn't be hurt. "You'll be in charge again by seven bells, sir," said the spokesman from the darkness.

"I told them," said Ridgeway, "that they had best not make any trouble, but they only laughed and retorted, 'That's all right, sir, you just lay low.'"

The next excitement came from the mate's room, whence issued loud cries for help, and "fire, fire," accompanied by kicks on the door, which sent one of the lower panels into splinters, and let a swirl of smoke out into the cabin.

For an instant, my heart stood still; but like a flash came the thought, "It's only a trick," and when Çayván called down the companionway to know what was the matter, I answered, nonchalantly, "Nothing at all, sir; the mate's set his room afire, that's all; I'll put him out."

The "Palma" was particularly well provided with fire apparatus connected with the main engine, so that all one had to do was to turn a faucet and the water did the rest.

"Let me out, let me out!" roared the mate, trying to shove his head and shoulders through the broken panel, while Jacky and I uncoiled the cabin hose.

"All right, matey, we'll tend to your case," said Jacky, dragging the nozzle into position; "let her come, sir," the last to me, and I turned on the water.

The air in the hose blew out like a dry blast, then came a few sputtering drops, and then a white stream, an inch in diameter, struck the mate full in the face. He lost no time in getting away from the door, and then we thrust the nozzle inside and washed down that stateroom as it had probably never been washed down before, though the "Palma" was a very clean ship.

At first, the mate abused us roundly for this treatment, but he soon changed his tune and begged for mercy, assuring me that the fire was all out, so I turned off the water and left him to meditate in his drenched quarters. This little excitement had one pleasing result: it brought the young ladies and their duenna out of the seclusion of their staterooms and into the main saloon. I easily persuaded them to sit at the table under the swinging lamp, and we talked in hushed voices until Wag gave a sudden bark, and we heard a stealthy movement beyond the gangway barrier.

I was on the lowermost bale with revolver cocked in an instant, just in time to cover Sam, the cook, who was in the other end of the passage. I made him climb over to my side, which he could do by squeezing through under the ceiling, and just then,

as good luck would have it, Lish, his assistant, appeared bound, doubtless, on a similar errand. He was easily persuaded to follow his *chef*, and I marched them before me back to the saloon where Aunt Leah and her charges were anxiously waiting to learn what was the matter.

"Two gentlemen to call upon Miss Leah," I announced gravely, as we came within the circle of light; and Leah, in spite of her anxiety, could not disguise a conscious and coquettish giggle when she recognized her two admirers.

"You may receive them at the locker forward there," I continued, indicating a semi-dark corner against the bulkhead.

Following, I made the two black men stand up before me and solemnly promise that they would protect Leah and her young ladies against all pirates and mutineers whatsoever, and I left them, confident that Aunt Leah would make them abide by their pledge. Then I went back to the swinging lamp, and if you will believe it, we three waxed quite merry over the situation. Of course, these young girls could not at all realize their own peril, should the ship fall into the hands of her piratical crew. And I, well, I was having a capital time, and I knew that Cayvan was watching me enviously through the skylight.

So another hour passed. Cayvan called me to take his place on deck, while he relieved me for a

while at the cabin table. Then he sent me below again, and it had just gone six bells when clang, clang, clang, went the fire alarm forward, and we all sprang to our stations, knowing instinctively that the hour had come.

Our experience with the mate had given my Jacky an idea which we had at once proceeded to carry out, laying the fire hose to the barrier of cotton bales. Cayvan, too, had arranged the after-deck hose for a like service.

CHAPTER IV.

A COLD RECEPTION; A FRIENDLY FAREWELL.

Ordering the young ladies to stay with Leah and her protectors, my Jacky and I sprang to the barrier. There was a trampling of feet from the direction of the galley and engine-room, and in a moment a man armed with a heaver peered around the angle of the passage and into the light from our lantern. He dashed forward with hardly a pause, closely followed by others; how many I could not see, for I turned the cock the moment they appeared, Jacky holding the pipe over the upper cotton bale. The stream struck the leader full in the face, literally knocking him over backwards, blinding and drenching him and his companions.

Few things take the fight out of a man so quickly as cold water, and as a good half-dozen of the storming party fell over their prostrate leaders, all hands came in for a thorough wetting, and were glad to scramble back under cover.

I turned the water off at once, and then we could hear trampling and splashing on deck overhead, mingled with a few shots, showing that Cayvan was

economizing powder and shot as we had done, by drawing an equivalent from the Atlantic Ocean.

Of course word was at once passed forward by the mutineers to stop the engines, so that this very demoralizing hose would become ineffective, and then it was discovered that, for some mysterious reason, the stoke-hole ladders had broken down under the weight of the men swarming up when the alarm struck. They could now only reach the deck singly by way of gratings and stanchions, which was a rather slow process. But the engines were stopped quickly enough, though we could hear Ridgeway giving her four bells for full speed ahead.

We could no longer use the fire hose, and the mutineers were gathering for another rush. We must now depend upon cold steel and lead instead of cold water. But, in the meantime, the desperate gang forward had secured another ally, — an ally terrible for us at the first, but one that shortly turned traitor to them. There was a longer wait than we expected. The ship lost headway and fell off into the trough of the sea, rolling heavily, her paddle-wheels splashing, and her sponsons now and then taking heavy blows from the crest of a wave. Cayvan ordered the spanker set, which brought her head to the sea and steadied her a bit, and then we began to hear cheers and songs forward. At this juncture, there came a hail from near the smokestack.

"Aft there! hallo! don't fire; it's Ridgeway"; and

without waiting to be reassured, the sturdy captain came running aft and tumbled in amongst us over the cotton bales somewhat out of breath.

"Those fellows are getting their courage up," he said, as soon as he could speak, "and they'll all be ready to make a rush before long."

"Yes," said Cayvan, "and we are ready for them."

"True for you! We must hold out against them. Where are the young ladies?"

"In the saloon. Go down there, if you like."

So down came the captain and cheered us up wonderfully, for we were getting a bit nervous over the long wait without fully knowing what was going on. Presently, he went to the companionway, and after consulting with Cayvan beckoned me to one side.

"I have Mr. Cayvan's permission," he said, "to stay below and help defend my passengers, should worst come to worst. I haven't any arms, you know."

"I know, and I wish you had, but we haven't any extra ones here. I might get you a cutlass, I suppose." Acting upon this, I went on deck and soon returned, bringing a regulation United States Navy cutlass with its belt, which the captain buckled on with evident satisfaction. Drawing the blade, he "hefted" it to try its balance and made a few dexterous passes in the air, as he said, "Just to get the swing of it."

These warlike preparations on the worthy cap-

tain's part were observed with some wonderment by the two Rebel maidens, who thought in their innermost hearts, probably, that he ought to be leading the mutineers. They whispered to one another, and then, "Why, Captain," said Miss Tolliver, "who are you going to fight?"

"Fight? Oh, nobody, my dear — that is — that is — ahem! Well, you see, if there was any trouble, somebody might think I was somebody else, and I want to have something to defend myself with."

Being confident that the captain would have to talk very plain Anglo-Saxon to these irreconcilable young Rebels before he could convince them of the loyalty of his intentions, I rose and walked to the barricade, whence I could see him laying down the law to them, while they had no hesitation in accusing him of treachery, alike to themselves and to the Confederacy whose daughters they were.

After a few minutes' talk they both began to cry, and he left them, coming forward to where I stood, his face very red.

"What's the use in arguing with women," he grumbled; "those innocents there have no more notion than babes what it would mean to us all if those ruffians got possession of the ship. I had to tell them at last that the mutineers were bound to turn pirates, and we should all be made to walk the plank. I think I have frightened them now," and the captain looked greatly relieved.

By this time the babel of voices in the forecastle had become uproarious and shaped itself — of all the airs in the world — into the chorus of "John Brown's Body," for that famous war song of the Federal troops had won its way into English seaports, and was lustily roared in waterside resorts whenever a rousing chorus was wanted, irrespective of its semi-devotional origin.

"Now for it, lads," shouted a commanding voice, as the notes died away. "Come on! Take you the lead below decks, Dave; come on —" and the ominous trampling of many feet sounded coming aft.

Somebody started up "John Brown" again, and on they came, dividing forward of the smokestacks and surging through the narrow passageways between the paddle-boxes.

"Odd numbers ready, aim at their knees, boys, fire," cried Cayvan. And five men blazed away as fast as they could with a revolver in each hand.

The even numbers reserved their fire, but began the instant the others slackened, and of the three or four score of big conical bullets that poured over the barrier of cotton bales, an uncommonly large proportion took effect.

But the rush was not checked. Johnny Bull is a stubborn fighter, as all the world knows to its cost, and stumbling over their fallen comrades, the mutineers pressed on, the roaring chorus "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah," wavering and dying out as a few of the

leaders reached the cotton bales and struck savagely across them with heavers and capstan bars, as they strove to climb over and carry the position by sheer weight of numbers.

These more desperate ones were killed or badly hurt to a man, I believe. At any rate, two of them lay dead within the barrier, when I came on deck after the fight was over, and a third hung limp across the cotton bales, where he had been cut down as he led the charge.

The bolder spirits had naturally kept in front, and as they went down before our fire, the rear rank men lost heart, and presently broke for the forecastle like a flock of panic-stricken sheep.

Below decks, our work was comparatively simple. After we had to abandon the use of the fire hose, our revolvers so completely commanded the narrow approach that only two of the assailants came within ten feet of the barricade, and these two stayed where they fell. We heard the rest tramping toward the forward companionway before the scrimmage on deck was fairly over.

Captain Ridgeway presently volunteered to see how matters fared in the engine-room and stoke-hole. He came back after a few minutes, reporting that most of the dangerous characters had gone forward, and were sulking in the forecastle, and if let alone would probably not molest us.

A dozen or so of the quieter sort, including one

engineer, could, he thought, be made to do duty. So without making too long a story of it, we made shift to get the ship under way again shortly after midnight, and with Captain Ridgeway on the bridge, ran up the Jersey coast; raised the Highland lights before sunrise; set the mutiny signal and got a detachment aboard from the guard ships, and let go our anchor off Bedloe's Island (now Liberty Island) by mid forenoon.

Of course, we blue-jackets had made a night of it, making everything as ship-shape as possible after the desperate attack. We could do but little for the wounded, except give them all the water they wanted; but we were so near port that assistance was quickly available, and soon the potter's field, the hospitals, and jails held all that were left of the "Palma" mutineers.

With the supplementary proceedings, I had nothing to do, though I was subsequently summoned as a witness at the trial of the mutineers, who were mostly sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. I had been merely a passenger, but Cayvan thanked me for my services, and so did Ridgeway, who gave me his London address, and told me that he had had enough of blockade-running and was going home to look for an assignment to duty in the Royal Navy. In point of fact, he resigned altogether after a year or two, having made enough out of his Confederate friends to live comfortably for the rest of his life. I have been to see him twice at his English home, and he

still loves to introduce me to people as his "Yankee prisoner."

Last of all I said farewell to my once deadly foes — the two young ladies. Twice before had I parted from them, — once in sore bitterness and wrath, again with rather sincere regret, — and now, I ventured to believe, with a fairly good standing for a Yankee in their Southern eyes. It would not be seemly for me to say here what I thought about them or either of them. I was certainly very sorry, indeed, to part with little Wag.

We all went ashore together on the government tug, — the young ladies, Aunt Leah, Captain Ridgeway, Wag, and I. Landing at the Battery, my companions took a carriage for the old New York Hotel, then the headquarters of Southern refugees, and a very hot-bed of secession, intending to sail for England by the next steamer.

As I bade Miss Edith good-by at the landing, she gave me a little three-cornered note, and then lifted Wag up to the open carriage window to kiss me good-by, which he did after the manner of his kind, and forthwith set up a dismal howl as the carriage drove away.

The last that I saw as they turned into Broadway was a little yellow tousled Irish terrier's head and two dainty white handkerchiefs waving farewell. It did not trouble my conscience one bit to reflect that I had the mate to one of those handkerchiefs in the innermost pocket of my reefer.

"'I SAT ME DOWN ON ONE OF THE BENCHES OF THE SEA-WALL.'"

It was not in a very cheerful mood that I strolled over to the Battery and sat me down on one of the benches on the sea-wall. But after staring at the animated scene before me for a while without seeing a single thing, I suddenly remembered the little three-cornered note. I had entirely forgotten it in the hurry of saying good-by.

I have it before me now as I write, rather yellow with age, and stiff in the joints for the same reason. It is written on a very inferior quality of paper with a Confederate flag stamped in color at the left-hand upper corner. The writing is rather fine, and the ink has faded, — it does not look very much like the bold chirography cultivated by young ladies of the present day.

Dear Mr. Benson [it reads]: We want to thank you for many kindnesses, as well as for bravely defending us against the mutineers of the "Palma." We are still good Rebels at heart, but our opinion of at least one Yankee sailor has changed since we first met him. Will you accept of our best wishes, and the little keepsake herein enclosed; perhaps you can wear it with your Medal of Honor. May it often remind you of your very friendly enemies. E. G. — H. T.

Within, wrapped in tissue paper, was a dainty bow of blue ribbon, hardly more than an inch across the wings, and delicately embroidered on one side were the initials E. G. and on the other H. T. Between the wings were the dates 1862–1863.

To my uneducated masculine perceptions, the em-

broidery material seemed to be some kind of silk in two shades of brown, and it was not till I showed it to "another girl," once upon a time, that I learned that my "friendly enemies" had each given me, for a souvenir, a thread of her own hair worked into the initials and dates.

I knew of nothing in the navy regulations prohibiting the bow, so I fastened it to the ribbon of my medal. I never met another officer in the service who wore a Confederate decoration, but somehow this did not seem to imply treasonable designs on my part.

CHAPTER V.

THE NAVAL ACADEMY — YOUNG "BANTAMS."

After reading my precious note a sufficient number of times, I wandered about the Battery in a somewhat blighted frame of mind, watching the tide come in until hunger asserted itself and drove me to the nearest restaurant, whence I walked up to where the Madison Square Garden now stands and took the next train for Rockledge.

Of my welcome home, and how I was made much of by everybody, I need not tell. Uncle Abner put me through some finishing touches for the Academy examination, and in June I went to Newport, passed easily for the second class, and was assigned quarters in Fort Adams, which had been turned over to the navy for academical purposes by the War Department. My prize money came in very opportunely for the purpose of an outfit, for Uncle Abner and his sisters helped too many poor boys to have very much to spare for their own sailor lad. Very proud was I to pay my entrance fee of fifty dollars out of my own pocket. Once mustered in as an acting middy, I was on the United States pay-roll as an officer

of the navy at the rate of five hundred dollars a year, — a princely income, indeed, from my point of view.

My class numbered nearly two hundred young fellows, most of them rather my juniors, so I was severely let alone in the matter of hazing and the like. I was assigned quarters with a slim little fellow from an inland state, who proved to be great on mathematics, ethics, and the like, but deplorably weak on practical seamanship. So, after a few days of mutual suspicion, we made a match of it, he coaching me in his own specialties, while I defended him against would-be hazers and taught him sea-craft, in which I regarded myself as a past master.

Naval affairs moved with a rush in those days, when every young fellow who could demonstrate his fitness was wanted for sea duty. It did not take many months to push bright boys through the Academy; and, although I can lay no claim to having been bright, even in my teens, I had practical navigation and naval routine by heart, and was thoroughly familiar with much that can never be learned at the Academy.

Owing to circumstances, which I need not here recount, I had been from the first a somewhat privileged character, and had acted as a sort of secretary for Captain Ross, so that I was familiar with official forms, and the customs of the service had become almost a second nature.

It was no way remarkable, therefore, that as the

year drew toward its close, a special order from the Secretary of the Navy came on from Washington, detailing a number of men from the three upper classes, and in December a lot of us were ordered to pack up our traps and report at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, for assignment to duty.

There was great rejoicing, you may be sure, at this prospect of active service, and it did not take us long to pack up the modest amount of luggage that is permitted to middies in the navy. We drew our pay, like officers and gentlemen, and went on by the first train the next morning, under command of the senior first-class man present, and with reckless extravagance took carriages at war prices from the 26th Street Station, and drove all the way to the Navy Yard at an expense of some ten dollars apiece, whereas it need have cost us only a few cents.

We drew up in great style in front of the commanding officer's quarters. Carew, captain of our detail, reported our arrival to the adjutant, who had us into his office, checked us off on the roster, and told us we could go our ways till the next morning at ten.

Most of us chose to stroll about the Navy Yard during the remaining hours of daylight, and my room-mate, McCrady and I, went off together. The whole spacious enclosure, some hundred acres in extent, was then, as never before or since, a hive of busy workers. From boiler and machine shop

went up a deafening clangor of hammers; from the great barn-like ship houses rose the musical tap of mallet and calking iron; along the sea-wall and the cob dock vessels of every kind were making ready for sea, or were being dismantled after a period of service. Graceful sailing craft, frigates with slender towering spars, stolid monitors, with no spars at all, and steamers of all sorts. Riggers were aloft, painting stages hung over the side, guns were being mounted and dismounted, ordnance stores, provisions, cordage, sails, were going aboard or coming ashore.

Jackies in their "dungarees" were running hither and thither, and at points which required watching smart marines paced back and forth with rifles on their shoulders, and officers in service uniform hurried to and from their ships, or strolled about, interested spectators like ourselves.

From the whole enclosure arose a not unmusical hum that spoke of tremendous energy and exhaustless resources.

It was rather dazing to us newly fledged middies and we walked on and on in a sort of trance, till at length we found ourselves beside a great dry dock, looking down upon the deck of a little gunboat which was having her copper scoured. Otherwise, except for her battery, she was apparently ready for sea service, and the ensign on her jackstaff told us that she was actually in commission.

I lost my heart to her at first sight, for she was a trim, clean-built craft, fore and aft rigged and not unlike my old love the "Otter" below the water line, though she was perhaps a little larger, and was fitted for a heavy rifle amidships beside those at bow and stern. She had, moreover, four light broadside guns in the waist, and looked as though she could either fight or run away with a fair chance of winning in either case.

"Bantam" was her name, and we walked all round her and looked her over from keel to truck, and the more I looked at her the more I became convinced that I had met my fate. We had completed our outside inspection, and were considering whether or no we should go on board, when a voice hailed from overhead.

"Hallo, there!" it said; "isn't that Jack Benson?"

The voice was familiar, but the sun struck me square in the eyes, and I could only make out that somebody was standing by the taffrail and calling me to come aboard.

So I replied, "Yes, that's my name, but I can't see you," and then, nothing loath, we walked round to the gangway, and who should grasp me by the hand as I jumped down on deck but my old friend, Lieutenant Morris, the same who was so hard hit in the fight at Myrona and who had always given me the credit for having saved his life. Of course I presented McCrady and told him how we happened to

be there, and then nothing would do but we must dine with him and spend the night on board, as he had unoccupied berths to put at our disposal.

Of course, being all adrift for quarters, we were only too glad to accept. So we went for our traps and were duly installed on board the "Bantam" as her captain's guests.

Morris had fully recovered from his wound, had been made a lieutenant commander, and thanks partly to merit and partly to friends at court, had been assigned to command a new gunboat built by designs made some years before by George Steers, builder of the famous yacht "America" and of the superb steam frigate "Niagara."

With a sailor's pride he took us all over his ship, which was in perfect trim, except that her battery had been landed in order to lighten her for docking.

At dinner, McCrady was rather out of it, for Morris and I had a lot to talk about.

"By the way, Benson," said he, when the soup was removed, "where's your medal? This is surely an occasion of 'state and ceremony'; you ought to have it in sight."

I blushingly produced the little morocco case, in which I carried it, from an inner pocket, and at his request passed it over to him for examination. He was not slow to note the little bow of blue. "What's this?" he asked, holding it up to the light. "E. G. and H. T. and something in the middle that's so fine

I can't read it." So I was obliged to tell, with burning cheeks, that the initials stood for the two young ladies whom we had captured on board the "Palma."

Of course he remembered them. Who wouldn't? And he made me tell him all about our more recent adventures, ending with the farewell on the Battery nearly eight months before.

"It's destiny, Benson. You're bound to meet them again, or one of them; I don't know which, do you?"

Of course I could not tell any more than he, but I was at once glad and sorry when the subject was dropped.

In the course of the evening it was arranged that we two should apply for assignment to the "Bantam," as her complement of juniors was not yet fully made up. Morris promised to back up our application, so we turned into our berths well satisfied with the day's experience.

All of us middies were on hand, according to orders, and answered to our names at the adjutant's office next morning. Commander Morris had been there before us, and after some delay and sorting of papers, big official envelopes were handed to a few of us, and the rest were told to report again the next morning.

Mac and I were among the lucky ones, and restrained our impatience with difficulty till we were well out of sight and behind one of the neighboring

buildings, when we eagerly tore open the envelopes. A glance told us that our hopes were realized. We were both ordered to report at once on board the "Bantam," and you may guess that we lost no time in so doing.

It was a bit galling to find Morris's manner change toward us when he came aboard about noon, but that's what a sailor is trained for and expects, so we put on our most punctilious manners and made the best of it. We were given two or three days' leave to purchase our outfit, for which purpose we had already received one hundred dollars each from the paymaster, that amount being allowed by our common Uncle Sam when he takes his boys out of the Academy and sends them to sea. Even at the war prices then prevailing, we found that with reasonable economy we could fit ourselves out very well for any emergency.

We went over to one of the great clothing houses in New York and had ourselves measured for the service uniform, including regulation overcoat and a liberal supply of white duck trousers. We bought our side arms at a military equipment store, and before our leave of absence had expired appeared on deck in "full fig." and presented ourselves before our commanding officer. He looked us over with a cold and critical air, though we fancied that we could see a good-humored twinkle in the corner of his eye, as though he remembered how he himself

had put on his officer's uniform for the first time, not so very long ago.

By this time the "Bantam's" copper was polished to suit Morris's ideas, and all hands were called to stations when the valves of the big dock were opened, and the murky harbor water began to boil up under the counter. A little thrill ran along the keel, the "Bantam" shook herself gently, seemed to draw a sigh of relief, and was once more afloat, never again to be absolutely at rest till she left her bones to bleach on a coral reef far down in the Mexican Gulf, — but that was long after I had left her, and is not a part of this story.

Other inanimate things may and do have their periods of rest: a ship while afloat, never. Machinery and tools, wagons and equipments of all sorts, may go comfortably to sleep when they are not in use; but the restless sea is ever working, lifting, pushing, seeking out weak points, ready to crush and drown without a moment's notice. Even when at anchor or tied up to a wharf, a ship is not quite still, and motion, be it ever so slight, means strain and friction and wear, which must in the end tell upon the strongest of constitutions. Sailormen are notoriously a superstitious lot, and small blame to them, considering what they see and hear. Many of them firmly believe that ships are quite as much alive as some people, and have their likes and dislikes, and moods and tantrums, just as the rest of us do.

Anyhow, the "Bantam" seemed ready to flap her wings, and I half expected to hear her crow as we warped her out of the dry dock. A spirit of cheerfulness diffused itself throughout the crew when we had moored her under the big crane, which already had one of our rifles swinging in mid-air ready to lower upon its carriage as soon as we made fast, and the guns were remounted by sundown.

We went under the coal chute and filled our bunkers after nightfall. Early the next morning the powder boat came alongside, the magazine was filled, fires were started, and Commander Morris went to headquarters for his orders. They were all ready, no secret about it, directing him to proceed to New Orleans, stopping at different points on the way with mails and despatches, and report to the commanding officer of the Gulf Squadron, David Glasgow Farragut, who had already made the most brilliant record of any officer in the navy, and stood, perhaps, the acknowledged head of his profession in all the navies of the world. He had led his fleet up the Mississippi, passed the formidable forts below New Orleans, and had opened the way for the capture and occupation of the city by Federal troops. With his flagship, the "Hartford," he, alone of his fleet, had run past the batteries at Port Hudson and patrolled the Mississippi from Vicksburg to the Red River.

That he would before long have other work cut out for any vessel under his command, was tolerably certain, and it was not long before we "Bantams" had elaborated a brilliant plan of campaign for him in which we resolved to have a creditable share.

CHAPTER VI.

A DANGEROUS DERELICT.

It is a good week's run from New York to New Orleans, and counting our stops, we could not expect to make the Mississippi Passes under fifteen or twenty days. This gave Morris a good chance, however, to get his crew well in hand, and he improved it to the best of his ability, for every good officer knows very well that it is much easier to maintain a reasonable discipline if one begins with excessive strictness at the outset. Accordingly, we very soon found that he was determined to give us Uncle Sam's navy regulations without any dilution whatever, and with such improvements as occurred to him.

We had orders to keep well out in the Gulf Stream, on the chance of running across some stray blockade-runner, and possibly a Confederate cruiser, for there were one or two still afloat, though the "Alabama" at this time was known to be pretty well on the other side of the world. After leaving our mails and despatches at Port Royal, we ran out some two hundred miles from land, and at daylight next morning the lookout reported something in sight which, on closer inspection, proved to be a derelict with only

the stumps of her masts standing. We could see that she was British built, as soon as we raised her hull fairly above the horizion. Steaming up to windward of her as near as we dared, and getting no answer to repeated hails, Morris sent a whaleboat to investigate, with Mr. Russell in charge and me for assistant.

There was only a moderate sea running, and as we went under her stern we read, "Norham Castle, Liverpool." A fragment of rope hung from one of the after davits, and Russell gave me leave to try if the inboard end was fast. The boat was cautiously backed under the stern, which the sea occasionally smote with a stunning crash, and as she rose on a wave, I made a grab, caught the rope, and went up hand over hand.

She was an old-fashioned craft with high forecastle and poop, and the deep waist was all a-wash, the high bulwarks amidships having been more or less knocked to pieces. The hatches were all gone, and boxes and bales were bobbing up from below at intervals, and swashing about from side to side as the vessel rolled. I could see all this from where I stood, and reported it to Russell, who bade me take a look into the cabin.

This I turned to do, but feeling a bit nervous with the grewsome surroundings, I first made fast a line at the lee-mizzen rigging and threw the end of it to the bow oarsman. Then going aft, I opened the companionway door and went down the brass-covered stairs,

dingy from lack of scrubbing. There was another door at the foot of the short passage, and opening this I saw that there were a few inches of water on the floor. Not caring to go a-wading unless it was necessary, I kicked the door so that it swung wide open with a bang, and the next moment I let go the most vigorous yell that I could command, and fled up the stairs for my life. It seemed to me, that two or more huge black hairy monsters were launching themselves at me from a couch at the far end of the cabin. I heard a sort of combined bark and howl, and saw the water fly under foot as it or they dashed toward me. With the instinct of terror, I banged the deck door behind as I fled toward the rigging.

Two Jackies had already gained the deck, and were staring toward me in a dazed way, as if they hardly knew whether to stand their ground or run.

I confess that I was badly frightened by what I had seen, but the sight of my shipmates went far to restore me. The deck door opened inward, and I had not taken half a dozen steps when a heavy body hurled against it accompanied by barks and growls, unmistakably of canine origin.

Then came a confusion of sounds; there was an instant's struggle, and fall accompanied by yelps as the dog was hurled backward down the stairs. Then the door was wrenched open, and what a figure that was that strode out on deck!

A bushy shock of red hair and beard; pale blue eyes

with the unmistakable gleam of insanity in them; the complexion white and drawn and the lips so dark as to be almost black. His checked flannel shirt was open, disclosing a muscular throat and chest. He was barefooted, and one leg of his trousers was torn away altogether, leaving the limb naked almost to the thigh.

He held an axe with the helve painted a brilliant red in his left hand, and his right was behind him holding, as I confidently believed, a loaded revolver.

We had come away without arms, as our errand promised to be peaceful. There was not so much as a cutlass among us. The maniac had closed the door behind him, and the dog now resumed his dismal howls within.

By this time Russell and four more men were on deck, and I think we were all rather anxious about the struggle that seemed imminent, for it is no joke for any number of weaponless men to tackle an armed giant and a madman at that.

But the maniac himself came most unexpectedly to the rescue. How we appeared in his disturbed vision no one can ever know. What he did was this: Drawing himself up to his full height, he slowly withdrew his right hand from behind him and deliberately, with a magnificent air, placed upon his head a tall stovepipe hat. It may have been beaver, perhaps, for its shiny nap was roughed up in patches,

and the whole structure much the worse for salt water and hard usage.

This act broke the strain. We could not, for the life of us, help laughing outright; but Russell, who was a reckless fellow and quick-witted withal, rose to the occasion. He touched his cap respectfully.

"Captain Morris, of the United States gunboat 'Bantam,' sends his compliments, sir, and requests the honor of your company at dinner. There is a boat alongside to take you aboard, sir."

I should, perhaps, explain here that the high silk hat is the official badge of the merchant captain. He wears it on all occasions which he deems worthy of full uniform. You may see the captain of an unpretentious little schooner bringing out his treasured "stovepipe hat" when he is making or leaving port, if he has any idea at all of maintaining the dignity of his station. We all knew, therefore, when this apparition donned a high hat that he was captain of the derelict, and Russell, with great presence of mind, addressed him accordingly.

The crazy captain looked hard at him for a moment, as if trying to clear the clouds away from brain and eye so as to be sure of his meaning. Then he replied with dignity: —

"I accept Captain Morris's invitation with great pleasure, sir, but I will come in my own boat."

With that he placed the terrible red-handled axe

upon its brass rests at the side of the house, and walked forward to the break of the deck.

"Mr. Negley," he called, addressing an imaginary mate, "you may lay the main yard aback and call away my boat."

I stole quietly aft and secured the axe, and another like it from the other side of the house, handing them to two of our men. The maniac stood silently looking forward and aloft, and I suppose that his disordered brain reclothed the dismantled ship in all the glory of her vanished canvas. For him a phantom crew manned the braces and swung in the weather yard-arm. But in the meanwhile a very material crew was approaching him from behind, and at a given signal from Russell, five stalwart bluejackets threw themselves upon his back or caught him about the legs and arms.

He went down under the shock, but fought like a wild animal, foaming at the mouth, and giving the whole of us all that we could do to handle him. Such is the superhuman strength of a maniac.

At last we got him securely bound, and with some difficulty, for he was a big man, lowered him over the side and took him aboard the "Bantam," where he was turned over to the care of the surgeon.

Morris sent us back again to save the dog, if we could, and at any rate to see if there were any instruments or other property worth saving.

It was nearly as formidable an undertaking to capt-

ure the dog as it had been to secure his master, but by skilful management we finally got a running bowline over his neck and soon had him in subjection. He was a magnificent Newfoundland, and Jacky was very tender with him, for we had no ship's dog, and this one would be a treasure, if we could get him to make friends.

Taking the instruments and papers, — there was no use in trying to save anything else, for the cargo was hopelessly water-soaked, — we went back to the "Bantam," just in time to hear the drum beating to quarters.

It is not every day that gunners have a chance to practise with a twelve-hundred-ton ship for a target, and Morris had resolved to expend his quarter's allowance of ammunition in practice firing, and at the same time do away with a dangerous obstacle in the highway of ocean travel.

That was upon the whole the most satisfactory gun practice that ever I saw. We had the whole ocean to ourselves, and could freely gratify the love of destructiveness that abides in every human breast without doing either owners or consignees a particle of harm. After an hour or so with solid shot at long range, during which Nevers and McCrady, my fellow-middies, made a record for themselves as gunners, we ran nearer, firing shell to make an end of it; edging up nearer and nearer, till the exploding shells tore great holes in her sides, and sent fragments of

assorted cargo, boots, woollens, and what not far and wide over the waves.

And now a very curious thing happened: "Rats desert a sinking ship," says the old sea adage, but I never expected to see it confirmed in such fashion as now. I was watching the effect of shells through my glasses, when one of the gun crew whispered to me in a somewhat awe-stricken voice, —

"Isn't there something moving there, sir? Atop of the galley."

I looked, and certainly saw some kind of an uncanny moving object that seemed to slide or crawl with a curious motion over the spars that were lashed together on top of the deck-house amidships. After looking a few moments, — there were two or three of us watching, — some one, who was sharper eyed than the rest, sung out, —

"Why, I'm blest if it ain't rats," and when once the suggestion was made, we all saw that he was right. The entire colony, which had been no doubt running riot among the eatables of the ship's stores ever since the desertion of the crew, had assembled. evidently in great panic, and were following some recognized leader toward the after part of the ship. They swarmed along the rail, and at last reached the quarter-deck, where they gathered on top of the deck-house, which they almost covered, — a horrible carpet, of great gray ship's rats, whose prospective destruction gave our blue-jackets unmitigated satis-

faction. Some of us began to try our revolvers on them, as we were at close quarters; but no sooner did they see that they were themselves furnishing the target for our marksmanship than the biggest one, a gray-backed old fellow, "piped all hands overboard," as one of the men put it, gave some kind of a signal, jumped over himself, and was immediately followed by the whole tribe.

The common Norway rat of our wharves and shipping can swim almost as well as his cousin, the water rat. It surprised no one, therefore, to see this numerous company jump fearlessly into the sea; but when they formed column, and strung out with the evident intention of saving their worthless lives by boarding the "Bantam," they fairly gave us all a new sensation. Our revolvers cracked merrily, you may be sure; but the boarding party did not waver for an instant, — on they came, rising and falling over the swells, a long, winding, gray ribbon relieved by pink noses and white teeth. At a distance, it might almost have been taken for the fabled sea-serpent.

"Shall I try them with grape-shot, sir?" asked one of the division officers.

"No, it's no use. You couldn't stop them, even with grape-shot. There's nothing for us to do but run for it." So he ran full speed ahead, well knowing that if once the rats got alongside, they would manage to climb aboard of us somehow. So the "Bantam" actually ran away, leaving the ill-fated

horde to perish in the Gulf Stream, probably the only instance on record of a Yankee man-of-war having been put to flight on the high seas by such despicable assailants.

As we gathered headway, the leader starboarded his helm, and the column swung into our wake, evidently determined to make a stern chase of it. However, the "Bantam" had the best of it, and presently put the now sinking derelict between her and her audacious pursuers.

We had to come to very close quarters indeed before we persuaded the "Norham Castle" to lift her old-fashioned square stern on high and go down with a long-drawn sigh, outrushing through her cabin windows, and leaving a swirl of dancing, foamy waters behind. We were in the Gulf Stream, and no doubt she went down five or six hundred fathom before she found her final resting-place on the ocean's bed.

When the lookout came down from aloft, he reported that, as soon as we had dropped them astern, the rats bunched themselves, and after a short consultation, broke into column again and headed about "west-nor-west."

The forecastle soberly figured it out that they ought to make Cape Romain inside of a week with good weather, at the rate they were going; but the ward-room somehow suspected the lookout of insincerity. Such, however, is Jacky's faith in animal

instinct, that no doubt a large majority of our own ship's company thought that the rats knew perfectly well which way to steer to reach the nearest land, and were perhaps a bit superstitious about leaving such accomplished creatures to drown. That was the last we saw of them, and they probably fell a prey to the prowlers of the Gulf Stream.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW ORLEANS AND THE "LOWER COAST."

We were on our southward course again by mid afternoon, with guns secured and everything in its usual apple-pie order, when the surgeon came up from below. Mr. Dabney had the deck and chanced to be talking with me at the time. The surgeon joined us.

"It's very queer," he said, "but I believe that fellow has come to his senses, and the firing did it. You see, I had him laid out pretty nearly under the big pivot-gun amidships, not knowing there was going to be any gun practice. Well, you know the concussion is something tremendous just there, and at the first fire he gave a shriek and a bounce and writhed painfully for a few minutes, until one of the other big guns was fired, when he quieted down and went to sleep, and took not the slightest notice of all the rest of the firing. He waked a few moments ago and seems perfectly sane, but I've given him a dose that will keep him quiet awhile longer."

A short time after this, I went down to look at the patient and found him sleeping like a baby. Next day he was in his right mind, and when he had

washed and dressed and the barber had taken a turn at his hair and beard, he came out as fine a specimen of the British merchant skipper as you would wish to see.

Morris had him in to dinner before we left him at Nassau, where we touched to leave despatches for the Consul.

The true story of the "Norham Castle" must ever remain a mystery of the sea, for the last thing her captain remembered was having her reefed down close, and making very good weather in a hurricane down in the Caribbean. There were evidences that he had received a hard crack on the head, perhaps from a falling block, and the crew had probably left him for dead and deserted the wreck after the gale subsided. The discharge of our big rifle had in some mysterious way restored to their normal condition the disturbed brain cells, but how the poor fellow had subsisted during the few weeks that intervened between the last entry in the log-book and our rescue, no one but Bosun, the big Newfoundland dog, knows, and he won't tell.

Bosun, by the way, was regularly acquired by purchase for the "Bantam." He learned to answer to his name at roll-call, and was at last killed in action and buried at sea, like a good sailorman.

That was our only adventure on the voyage to New Orleans, except that we chased a presumable blockade-runner into Havana, and stopped for a

day at the dry Tortugas to fill up our empty coal bunkers.

In due time we sighted the guard ship off Southwest Pass, and, exchanging signals with her, pushed on against the boiling current, now red with Mississippi mud, and drew in between the low-lying arms of the great delta.

We picked up a negro pilot, Reddy Napoleon by name, at the station a few miles up the pass, and pushed on through tortuous reaches of the great river locally known as the Lower Coast, past the forts which Farragut had silenced two years before, and dropped our anchor deep into the channel mud off the Crescent City, only to find orders waiting for us to put to sea again after such refitting and replenishing as seemed absolutely necessary.

New Orleans, in those days, was dreaded of all senior officers and beloved by their juniors. It was as bitterly rebellious as ever, but the gay creole nature, half French and half Spanish, had long since reasserted itself, and the city presented a scene of lively interest to officers and sailors alike, although they were in a measure accustomed to being shut off from the outer world when on shipboard.

It was here that I first saw our gallant Admiral. He came alongside in his barge without warning, but the officer on watch promptly recognized the blue flag with four stars, and we had the side quickly manned and all hands at stations when he came aboard.

He looked over the "Bantam's" battery, and I overheard him say to Morris: "I'm glad you have Parrotts instead of Sawyer guns for rifles. They are the better of the two — not likely to burst, and when they do, they are not nearly so dangerous." He had just returned from a short leave of absence at the North, whither he had gone with his flagship, the "Hartford," which, with something like two hundred scars of shot and shell, was sadly in need of an overhauling in dry dock.

Next day, we learned that we were to take him "home" to the blockading squadron off Mobile, and I was very highly flattered when Morris detailed me to act as the Admiral's attendant during his stay on board. For he had come up to New Orleans for a few days without any of his personal staff. This temporary post was not likely to entail any very irksome duties, but it was one which would at least justify me in being on hand and seeing what I could of the greatest naval commander since Nelson. He was sixty-four years old at that time, and carried his years easily.

The story of his first sea-fight was not so generally known then as it is now, but McCrady had picked it up somewhere in his omnivorous reading, and he told it to us at mess with a result that I think would have gratified the Admiral himself if he could have been present.

Indeed, it was little to be wondered at that we

youngsters should look with something very like hero worship upon this kindly featured, elderly gentleman who, as a middy, away back in 1814, had helped defend the old sailing frigate "Essex" in Valparaiso harbor. Of that gallant, hopeless fight against overwhelming odds, every school-boy has read, and we "Bantams" exulted when we heard, for the first time, the story of how young Farragut had handsomely whipped a British midshipman on the deck of his own ship after the surrender.

This story, as told by Farragut himself, is to the effect that a certain English middy, called "Shorty," made a prize of a pet pig belonging on board the captured "Essex." This pig Farragut claimed as personal property when it was brought on board the "Phœbe" after the engagement, and it was forthwith decided among the bystanders that the question must be settled man-o'-war fashion. A ring was formed on the "Phœbe's" deck, and Farragut thoroughly drubbed his opponent in a few rounds. The pig was carried off as the spoils of war by the victor, who felt that he had done what he could to restore the prestige of the American flag in British eyes.

We were ready to sail by the time that the Admiral was ready to go, and steamed up to our anchor as soon as he came over the side. A vessel at anchor off New Orleans carries perpetually a tawny hued wave crest at her cut water, and leaves

a wake astern of her as though she were going ahead at good speed. It seems impossible that sailing vessels can ever make their way up from the Passes against such a current, and yet they do; and, in the old days, before steam towboats were known, the whole foreign trade of New Orleans worked the river under canvas.

The little "Bantam," however, ran up the Admiral's flag, broke her anchor out of the mud, turned on her heel in mid channel, and dropped the Crescent City out of sight.

The Admiral walked the deck with Morris for an hour or so, watching the swiftly gliding panorama of rich plantation and cypress timber that forms the Lower Coast, then he went below, and presently Morris called for me. We followed into the captain's cabin where the Admiral was seated at the table with a lot of official letters before him. Morris presented me, adding: "I've detailed one of my midshipmen to be on hand, if you want anything, Admiral; he'll be within hearing of your bell. His name is Benson."

Farragut nodded, hardly looked up from a chart that he was studying, and I discreetly retired into the ward-room passage, where I could amuse myself better than in the august presence of the flag officer.

Hardly, however, had I made myself comfortable with a book, when "ting" went the bell. I was wanted.

The Admiral looked me over keenly as I stood before him. "Commander Morris tells me that you can write so that one can read it. Just copy that letter for me, will you?"

I sat down and made the copy, which covered half a page or more. It was merely some matter of routine that required his signature. He read it over and signed it, and then gave me some more copying, and I was kept busy for two hours or more.

I would much rather have stood my watch on deck; but it was, at least, something to have been in the company of this man, whose fame as a great naval captain was already world-wide.

"Now read that to me," he said at last, handing me a rather long document bearing the imprint of the Navy Department at the top. "My eyes are not so good for reading as they were once."

I had no difficulty with the manuscript, which was written in a plain clerkly hand, and related to the condemnation of some recently captured blockade-runner. After dictating an endorsement for the report, he told me to go on deck, and he presently followed. We were just passing the forts where he had won his first great victory nearly two years before, running by the powerful batteries, breaking through obstructions, warding off fireships, and sinking near a dozen Rebel gunboats and rams.

"I've never passed here but once before in broad

daylight," he said to Morris, "so I must be pardoned for wanting to look it over."

Morris said the correct thing in reply, and presently had the old gentleman fighting the battle over again with boy-like enthusiasm.

I managed, without seeming officious, to hang about most of the time within ear-shot and catch a good deal of what was said.

Here was where the "Manassas" rammed the flagship; here was where a chain stretched across the channel and was destroyed by Lieutenant Caldwell; here was where a fireship bore down on the fleet, and there where the "Varuna" ran through the Confederate squadron, firing both her batteries, and sinking three of them, only to receive her death wound from the ram "Stonewall Jackson."

There were still blackened wrecks at intervals along the shore where ships of both sides had left their bones after the fight. I could not but hope that the Gulf squadron would have at last one other such day and send me there to see. Night fell, and the Admiral having turned in early, I followed suit, being excused from other duty while on this special service. I was awakened betimes by feeling the "Bantam" take a weather roll, and went on deck to find her pointing straight out into the Gulf under the full glory of a tropic dawn, and dipping over pale green rollers that came pulsing up across

the still Southern sea. Pelicans were sailing about, kites were soaring and fishing, and now and then a whiff of fragrance drifted out from the distant shore on the dying land breeze.

After breakfast the Admiral had some more letters for me to write, and waxed a little more friendly when we were done, asking me how old I was, and telling some stories about his own encounters with Spanish pirates in the early days along the Florida straits, and after we had put him on board the "Hartford" off Mobile, I felt that I had become quite chummy with him. I found out afterward, that it was all on account of his absent son, Loyall, of whom I had somehow reminded him. So I abandoned hopes of immediate promotion, and settled down to the monotonous routine of blockading.

However, the Admiral had lost his heart to the "Bantam," to some extent. Her handiness, her powerful armament and comparatively light draught, and above all the excellent training and discipline of her crew, of which he had had a chance to form an opinion during our run down from New Orleans, had convinced him of her efficiency for any service.

CHAPTER VIII.

REDDY NAPOLEON — CROCODILE COVE.

Thanks, perhaps, to our economical consumption of coal, we were shortly sent off to patrol the coast to the eastward, going as far south as there seemed to be any need of going. There was at this time quite an opportunity for blockade-running along the shores of the eastern Gulf; several large rivers, notably the Appalachicola and the Suwanee and others, afforded access by steamboat far to the northward across Florida and into Alabama and Georgia, where the then existing railroads opened lines of communication with the interior. The adventurous trade was for the most part carried on by small schooners, which passed themselves off, if possible, for spongers or fishermen, and were able very often to give us the slip and get into shoal water among oyster beds and intricate channels, where we could not follow even in small boats. How the fellows managed to nose out their landfall so accurately that with a fair wind they would run close in shore even of a dark night and be seen anchored in the chops of the channel waiting for daylight to run in, was a feat very creditable to their seamanship.

Our general instructions did not warrant us in stopping long at any one place, nor did Morris want to do so, for it was far better fun for all hands to keep moving, and with reasonable luck we could probably do quite as much good.

We had a black pilot aboard who knew the West Florida coast, if he did not know anything else,—which he didn't to speak of. When I say "to speak of," I mean it. For he was so nearly dumb, that he could only convey his meaning by signs and by different renderings of certain guttural notes, which he could execute with some degree of success. He was singularly intelligent in some directions, but so hopelessly dense in others, that not many of us could make any headway at all in communicating with him.

He had shipped at Pilot Town under the name of "Reddy Napoleon," and he answered so far as he could to either name. He had at once taken a strong liking to my mate, McCrady, who, on his part, had not the least objection to being waited upon, and at the same time took a certain scientific and scholarly interest in studying the dumb man's methods of making himself understood. The result was that in the course of a fortnight, Mac had practically mastered the pilot's signal code, and was usually ordered to "stand by to translate," when we were in shoal water.

At such times it was really laughable to see Napoleon gesticulate and mumble, and hear Mac interpret his jargon.

"'Tain't regular," I heard an old sailor remark one day, "but it seems to work." And so Napoleon came to be looked upon with great respect by all hands.

Practically, he installed himself as Mac's body servant, and I found the two one day studying the coast map, published with a book that McCrady had somehow got hold of, to wit: Williams's "West Florida," printed in 1827, and long since out of print. The map does not agree, in all respects, with the United States Coast Survey; but its highly colored outline appealed to Napoleon's artistic sense, and he gesticulated and failed to articulate with unusual fluency.

"What's he up to, Mac," I said, after looking on for a moment.

"Well, here we are, you know, off Cheecola Sound. Napoleon says the wind is coming in from the southwest this afternoon, and is going to hold steady for two or three days, at least. We all know what that means. He tells me further, that he knows of a place where two or more boats can hide and command the channel perfectly; do you catch on?"

"Well, I should say so; let's do it."

So we called in Nevers, our third midshipman, and put our heads together. A southwest wind for three days was fair for blockade-runners bound for our cruising ground, and every night, while the wind held, the chances would be favorable. The question

was, how to manage so that we, and not Russell or some others of our seniors, should be sent on the expedition.

It is not every commander who takes kindly to suggestions volunteered by subordinates. I wouldn't have hesitated a moment to go to my old Captain Ross with any plan that came into my head. He would have listened to me, even if he had laughed at me about it afterward. But Morris was different.

At length, we concocted the following: Mac had been ordered to go and sound out the channel at low tide that afternoon, with a view to running into the sound, and during his absence, Napoleon was to approach the captain and endeavor to make him understand. Nevers and I would be within reach, and when Morris lost patience, as he was sure to do, trying to comprehend the pilot's lingo, he would, in Mac's absence, call upon us to interpret.

Now Mac himself did not care so very much about cutting-out expeditions — taking soundings was more in his line. So we could put in a prior claim for the more exciting work, and he wouldn't mind in the least.

In due time, the tide ran out, — it does not rise and fall more than a few inches in that latitude, anyhow, and only once in twenty-four hours at that, but such as it was, it ran out, and Mac got away with his yard-stick and lead-line. I had a division at cutlass drill on the main-deck, and Morris was stopping now and

then in his walk, to watch us. Presently, Napoleon came past, rolling his eye expressively at me, as I stood at the end of the double line of blue-jackets, and I presently heard him making futile efforts to express himself on the quarter-deck. After a few minutes of this, I heard Morris say, "No use, Napoleon, I can't make it out."

"M-ud-m-tk-sn."

"Who, — Mr. Benson?"

"Un," nodding.

"Come here a moment, Benson."

"Yes, sir." And bidding a warrant officer continue the drill, I presented myself.

"Can you understand our pilot, here?"

"Not very well, sir; not so well as McCrady can."

"Well, see what you can make of him now. McCrady won't be back for an hour." So Napoleon repeated his story with the usual gestures and guttural exclamations. I could not have made head nor tail of it if we had not rehearsed earlier in the day.

"Shoorsh um (standing with arms extended northwest and southeast) um, um (pointing to the sun with one hand and to the horizon below with the other)."

"Sou'west wind coming in after sunset, sir," said I boldly.

Morris nodded.

"Um, sst, um, sh!"

"I know that," said Morris; "that means blockade-runners."

"Yes, sir," said I, "that's what he means."

So the strange colloquy went on, and I translated with some simulated hesitancy, till between us we made Mr. Morris draw his own inferences according to our own ideas.

"What do you think of that, Benson?"

"I'd like to try it, sir."

"Well, tell Mr. Dabney I'd like to see him."

Down I went to the ward-room and routed out Dabney, begging him to remember me in his will. Then back to my cutlass division, which I dismissed, as the hour for drill was up.

After half an hour or so, word was brought to Nevers and me to report in the captain's cabin. He and Dabney had the coast-survey charts spread open before them, and Morris asked me, without preface, if I would like to take charge of a boat expedition.

I nearly executed a double shuffle at the prospect, but restrained my expression within due bounds of official decorum.

"Well, get yourselves ready. I ought to send Dabney or Russell, but I don't quite like to spare them to-night. Mr. Dabney will see to fitting out the boats, however. You may go and attend to them now, Dabney."

Then turning to me, he gave me some instructions, to the effect that we were to take with us three days' rations, going into camp in the hammock on St. Jude's Island, where we should be concealed from outside

observation, and then capture or destroy any blockade-runners that came within reach.

"The only thing that I am anxious about," he added, "is this continued fine weather. We have not had any rain, or sea, or storm of any kind to speak of since leaving New York. Now if anything in the shape of a hurricane should come up, you will be safe enough on the other side of the island, and I shall run in for shelter by the East Pass, if I can make it, or, if not, by any of the inlets to the eastward of this."

The rest of the afternoon was busily occupied in getting everything ready for the expedition. The boats' crews were made up of volunteers, of whom there was no lack, eighteen men being allowed to each boat, so as to give two full reliefs at the oars with a few extras for emergency in case of accident.

McCrady came home under sail with the last of the offshore breeze, and Napoleon was made to repeat his story again, Mac's rendering thereof bearing comparison fairly well with ours, but being considerably fuller since it was a direct translation from the original.

It was one of the conditions that Napoleon should go along to pilot us, but it was equally necessary that he should return to the "Bantam" again. Accordingly, a third boat was sent in charge of Acting Master Russell, with Napoleon on board, who at the last moment so entreated McCrady to

go too, that leave was granted; indeed, it was almost indispensable that Mac should be on hand wherever Napoleon was required to do any talking, and Mac very shortly acquired a nickname as "Napoleon's aide," which he did not relish very much, but accepted, nevertheless, with the good nature which was one of his characteristics.

As soon as it was dark, so that we could not very well be made out from shore, Morris steamed slowly up toward a pass called "New Inlet," and we got away, the three boats of us, on the flood tide, which was now beginning to make gently into the bay.

Napoleon and McCrady were in the bows of the leading boat (Russell's), and after pulling for half an hour word was passed astern, and resting on our oars, we drifted silently in between two white beaches where the gentle Gulf rollers broke in phosphorescent whiteness on the sand.

In a few minutes we floated into an eddy behind the point of St. Jude's Island, and resumed our oars, pulling eastward in very shoal water until "the bottom dropped out," when Napoleon signalled hard aport, and we followed him into a crooked waterway that soon became too narrow for oars. At the mouth of this, Russell stopped with his boat, and I took the lead, four men standing and using their oars as setting poles. Napoleon transferring himself and his "aide" temporarily to my boat, we advanced up the inlet, which soon widened out into a

dark little land-locked harbor, or more properly pond, surrounded by a dense hammock[1] growth which prevented our seeing or being seen in any direction.

Napoleon now gave some of his expressive grunts by way of farewell, and disappeared silently in the surrounding blackness. He was gone some twenty minutes, and then returned and conveyed to Mac the information that the coast was clear and no signs of life about.

I asked him, for my own satisfaction, a few questions about our unknown surroundings, — questions which were answered by McCrady's help, — and then wishing each other luck, he and Mac waded down the creek together towards Russell's boat, whose oars we presently heard as they rowed back toward the inlet, leaving us in our solitary bivouac. The tide came brimming in through the dark inlet and filling up our little harbor, which we could only see through the force of imagination, as we could not build fires

[1] The word may occur so often in these pages, that for the benefit of Northern readers it perhaps calls for definition. It is sometimes spelled "hummock," or "hommack," etc., but hammock represents the common local pronunciation, and is doubtless the more correct form. It is the sole survival of the language spoken by the native races of Florida when the Spaniards first discovered the country. These races were allied to the Lucayans of the Bahama Islands, and hammock means simply a tract of woodland where the natural growth is of hard wood, such as oak, ash, and the like, as distinguished from the swamps and lowlands where only cypress, pine, and other soft woods are found.

for fear of advertising our position to possible enemies.

By dint of feeling about and with the help of our bull's-eye lanterns, we found a place above high-water mark where the men could lie on the sand.

Leaving Nevers to see that the bivouac was made as silently as possible, I took three men, and, groping our way through a little used trail, came to the edge of the timber some two hundred yards from the boats. Leaving them there as a picket post, I was just returning to the boats when I remembered Captain Ross's clever device of having a private signal whistle for the "Otter," and wished that we "Bantams" had one like it. Well, why not? So on the impulse I whistled as nearly as I could in imitation of the crowing of a cock. One of the pickets caught it in a moment, and telling them to use it and listen for it, if anything happened, I went back to the boats and taught half a dozen of the men the same signal. In a few minutes all hands knew it, and could with difficulty be restrained from advertising their whereabouts by doing the new signal in unison.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT ALARM; AN EARLY SCOUT.

The camp was asleep presently but for one man in each boat, who had orders to awaken me on the least alarm, and call me, at any rate, at the first streak of dawn.

I did not intend to go to sleep at all, but I suppose that I must have dropped off, for I was aware of being taken by the shoulder.

"Mr. Benson, Mr. Benson, there's something coming up the creek."

I sat up and shook myself awake. After listening for a moment, there certainly was a noise in the darkness down toward the mouth of the inlet, — a noise that I could not in the least understand. Telling the man in the other boat to arouse Nevers, I sent him ashore to awaken the men.

In the darkness, as he stepped from one thwart to another, an oar rolled over and made an exaggerated noise in the stillness, and then all was silent again, save for the slight bustle of the men sitting up, throwing off their blankets, and brushing the beach sand out of their hair and eyes.

For a few minutes there was no repetition of the

noise, and then a gentle splashing and sliding was resumed. To me, in my excited state of mind, it sounded exactly like the advance of a boat against the current. Now and then there came a half-human grunt, whenever there was an unusually loud splash; and at last, such was the tension of my nerves, I almost fancied that I could see the bushes parted at the opening to the inlet.

Just at this crisis, when the men were bunched together on the beach with their revolvers ready in their hands, there came from the heart of the solemn midnight overhead two or three staccato barks, followed by a long-drawn, uncanny cry, inexpressibly mournful, and as though there had been a prearranged signal the big alligator, who had been sculling herself up the creek, emitted a hiss of rage or terror as she scented human creatures, and lashed the water angrily with her tail.

It was little short of a miracle that somebody did not let off a carbine or a revolver out of pure nervousness, for I assure you that the big brown owl of the Gulf States can sing a very blood-curdling song when he tries.

The tension of our nerves relaxed instantly, and a rather uneasy laugh came out of the darkness behind me as I stood in the stern of the cutter. Everybody recognized the owl, but few, if any, knew what the grunts and hisses meant. I am sure I didn't, so I hailed in the sternest tones I could command, —

"Who goes there?"

No answer.

"Answer, or I'll shoot."

Silence.

Bang!

Of course, I could only aim at a venture, but the flash and the report served to terrify Mistress Alligator. At the same moment Nevers flashed the lens of his bull's-eye lantern at her, and there she lay, half in the water, her two eyes gleaming like coals, and her shiny back humped up as if for a spring. As we looked, two or three of her numerous babies swam alongside and climbed upon the maternal back.

It was very comical to see the little creatures cock their heads in the yellow gleam of the lantern, for the group was not more than a boat's length distant, and Jacky's spirits rallied with characteristic rapidity.

"Is this a free show, or is there something to pay for it?" I heard one of our Irish jesters say in the darkness behind me.

"Yes, there may be the mischief to pay, if she comes for us. Jones, Ruggles, stand by with your carbines! aim at her eyes; keep the lantern on her, Nevers."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Two reports rang out almost simultaneously, and then there began in that little harbor a "circus," the like of which I never expect to see again. The shal-

low water boiled literally like a pot, and if the crocodile was really the scriptural "leviathan" the familiar quotation was very successfully illustrated.

I made the men put away their firearms and stand by with drawn cutlasses, for I was afraid they might shoot each other in the scrimmage, if she came ashore. But it was her death flurry. She thrashed herself into the shoal water, and hit my boat a resounding whack with her tail, and at that half a dozen blue-jackets jumped in and finished her with their cutlasses, one or two of them getting their feet knocked out from under them, as she swept semicircles with her mighty tail in her death struggle.

The native tribes of Florida knew long ago that there were two kinds of alligators in their waters, and they even taught the scientists how to distinguish them by name. To them the common alligator is "Allapatta," but the crocodile is "Allapatta Hadjo (mad alligator), which the scientific folk, not at all knowing that the Indians had gotten ahead of them, translated into *Crocodilus ferox*. They also called him *Crocodilus acutus*, when the Indians had already named him "the sharp-nosed alligator." The principal visible difference between the two is that the crocodile has a noticeably sharper and narrower nose, and the longest of his lower teeth project clean through what our blue-jackets called "hawseholes" in the roof of his mouth.

I must needs make a little diversion here in the

direction of natural history. Professor Hornaday, now superintendent of the Peabody Natural History Museum in New York, is no doubt fairly entitled to the honor of having discovered that a true crocodile is found in the coastwise waters of Florida. That is to say, he discovered and identified him as something quite different from the ordinary Mississippi alligator that is found throughout the cypress swamps and fresh-water savannahs of the Gulf States. Thus it happened that the boats' crews of the "Bantam" engaged in the expedition of which I had charge, killed a genuine crocodile, although they may not have known it, on this particular night of which I am telling the story. Next day, during the hours of waiting, some of our men cut off the supposed alligator's head and buried it in the sand, from whence it was to be eventually rescued by McCrady, who was of a scientific turn of mind, and presented to a museum where it is identified as the head of a genuine crocodile, and a very large one at that.

We had some fun, too, chasing the little crocodiles next day, and succeeded in capturing several of them, some of which survived their subsequent experiences, and were safely established as pets on board the "Bantam," much to the disgust of Bosun, the ship's dog, who never could abide the sight of them, and sooner or later was guilty, I believe, of bringing their innocent little lives to an abrupt termination.

I was very sorry that the firing had taken place, for there was no telling who might have heard it. But it had certainly been unavoidable. Making sure that the alligator was sure enough dead, I told the men to turn in again and get what sleep they could, while I went up the trail to inspect the picket post.

I gave the "Bantam" whistle as I approached, and it was promptly answered. Of course the men had heard the noise at the boats, and did not know what to make of it, but they had stuck to their posts like good fellows. The reports of the carbines, they told me, were greatly muffled by the woods, so I hoped that no unfriendly ear had heard them, as indeed proved to be the case. Returning to the boat through the dark hammock, I got a good two hours' sleep before I was called, and found the dawn just lighting up the east.

Calling two men to accompany me, we hurried up the trail past the picket post, and could see against the brightening sky a bluff of which Napoleon had told us, whence we could command a view of the West Pass, and the most practicable channel for blockade-runners. Cautioning my companions not to show themselves any more than they could help, we made our way near the edge of the timber, and reached the slope of the bluff as the light began to grow stronger. Leaving my companions a few yards behind, I crept up, and peeped cautiously over the crest.

The first thing that caught my eye was a triangular white flag, flying from a pole set in a narrow gorge of the sand dunes, and evidently visible some distance at sea, though not to be seen readily in either direction along the beach. Naturally, this increased my desire to be as invisible as possible, so I raised myself very, very slowly a little higher, and was presently aware of two broad-brimmed, dust-colored slouch hats, and two pairs of butternut-clad shoulders just below the brow of the bluff.

Third and last, I saw two schooners, five or six miles offshore, staggering under every stitch of canvas they could carry, and racing in toward the inlet as fast as the freshening Gulf breeze could drive them.

There was a sight to stir the blood of a young and ambitious naval commander! But what was to be done with the two "Johnny Rebs," who could only be here for a purpose?

Ducking my head out of sight, I backed carefully down the slope to my companions, turning over in my mind the problem thus suddenly sprung upon me.

No doubt the white flag meant "all right, come on," or something to that effect. Evidently, our shots in the alligator scrimmage had not been heard, for the Johnnies evidently had no suspicion of any hostile blue-jackets at hand. My men looked at me inquiringly, as I cautiously withdrew and returned to them.

"THERE SPRANG UP A YOUTHFUL FIGURE IN CADET GRAY."

In low tones, I explained the situation, adding that we must capture the two men with as little disturbance as possible. My plan was to cover them with our carbines at close quarters, and command their surrender on pain of instant death. I told my men to fire without an instant's hesitation if any movement was made to seize the arms, which I made no doubt lay within easy reach.

We got into position without trouble and without having been heard, and standing up, — I own that my heart was thumping wildly, — I stepped forward one or two paces and cried aloud with my revolver at the present, "If you move, you're dead men."

There was an instinctive reaching for rifles, and from behind a tuft of grass that had concealed him, there sprang up a youthful figure in cadet gray. Like a flash, he swung up his revolver and fired, the bullet cutting my cap band. Almost at the same instant *crack* went one of the blue-jacket's carbines, and throwing up his arms, my old schoolmate, Haines Gordon, fell backward and rolled over and over part way down the seaward slope of the sand dune.

I had recognized him just as he fired; whether he knew me or not, I could nòt say. His hand may have been quicker than his eye, — they learn that kind of legerdemain down in the Dixie, where boys are, or used to be, brought up to this sort of thing very early in life. Of course I ought to have shot him first, having decidedly the advantage, but I

didn't, somehow; I never was very quick with my pistol, and indeed I don't think a Yankee boy can often learn to be as quick as is his Southern cousin.

There was no time to lose; starting my men towards the boats at the "double," with their disarmed prisoners trotting along before them (these men had promptly surrendered as soon as they saw the fall of their officer, and were aware that they were helpless under the muzzles of my revolver and the remaining carbine), I dashed down the bluff to Gordon's side. He lay with his face deep in the sand; with an aching heart I turned him over. There was an ugly hole in the side of the gray tunic, darkly stained and wet around its edges.

I unbuttoned it, tore away the shirt, and twitching a handkerchief from my pocket, I stuffed it into the wound. There was a gold locket hanging by a string about his neck. I jerked it off, hastily possessed myself of such papers and small personal belongings as I could find ready to hand. Then laying him in as easy a position as I could, I started on a keen run after my escort, taking a glance at the blockade-runners as I topped the bluff.

CHAPTER X.

THE TAKING OF THE "BOLD BRITON."

The two schooners were still standing in with all canvas drawing, — as pretty a sailing race for two as one would wish to see, and unbeknown to them a good deal depended on the result. Evidently, they had not observed the capture of the signal station guards. Indeed, they could hardly have seen us at that distance, even if they had been looking.

I reached the outpost almost as soon as my men did, and taking all hands with us we hurried down the trail. All idea of a hot breakfast was abandoned at once, and leaving our more bulky camp equipage and the prisoners with four men as a guard, we rushed the two cutters down the inlet to the beach, paying small heed to a big alligator who scuttled away in short order when he saw us coming. No doubt he was the father of the interesting family whose acquaintance we had formed the night before. The fathers of alligators, I regret to say, are fond of the young of their species as an article of diet, and the mammas are obliged to use summary measures in order to protect the brood from speedy extermination.

The schooners were still hidden behind the point of the island as we made sail; but hardly had we begun to heel over, before the strengthening breeze, when we espied them.

In the West Pass of Cheecola Bay, the ship channel takes a sharp turn from north-northeast to southeast. Small vessels can keep right on across the sound at high water; but to look at them, at least, one of these schooners would have a close shave of it to carry her draught across the shallows.

Our object was to intercept the incoming craft before they could get fairly into the sound, heading them off where the channel was so narrow that they could hardly have room to work ship. They had come up so swiftly, however, that there was small chance for that.

As soon as they recognized us for man-of-war's boats, the two skippers adopted different lines of policy. The one which we judged to have the least draught started her sheets, and evidently determined to run straight across the sound if she could; she was of American build, a centre-board craft, and could venture safely into half the depth required by the other. The larger one luffed sharply, and came up the deep channel. Neither of them dared to go about and try to work back to sea again, for the wind was blowing straight on shore, and what current there was set into the sound.

Telling Nevers that the Yankee-built craft was

his game, I ordered my masts and sails thrown overboard, out oars, and lay by to throw a grapnel aboard, if I could get near enough. As soon as we came within range, we gave him a blank with the howitzer; but he took no notice except to set the British ensign. At the same time I noticed that the other schooner had defiantly set the Confederate flag, as if resolved not to mince matters now that she was in familiar waters.

Then followed the customary solid shot across the bows, upon which our English friend kept away, hoping, I suppose, to run clear of us by his greater speed under sail.

I had studied the chart pretty carefully, and thought that he could not hold his course more than a mile, so I steered to head him off when he came about.

"He'll run us down, if he can, sir," said Quartermaster Blake, who had the helm.

"Well, we'll give him something to think about first. Lay us alongside, if you can. I'll go forward and board him alone, if you'll put me within jumping distance."

Now I do not want to take any credit that does not belong to me. British blockade-runners were a tolerably desperate set, but they were rather shy about killing United States blue-jackets when there was a likelihood of being caught at it. I knew that if I could once get on board that schooner, I could take personal charge of her, even if I had nobody to back me up. Anyhow, I was bound to try it.

With the other schooner, which had set the Confederate colors and which Nevers had to deal with, the case was entirely different. She was either a privateer or a blockade-runner. In either case, she would not hesitate a moment to kill all the Yankees that came within range, blue-jackets or otherwise.

The Englishman came about presently when he neared the shallows, and stood for us close hauled on the port tack. I let drive a solid shot, as soon as he was within range, but he never luffed a particle, though the shot went neatly through his fore and main sails, and they immediately began to split under the strain of the wind.

Bidding the gunner load with canister, for I saw that we should be at close quarters before we could deliver another shot, I glanced aft at Blake. He was better able to navigate a man-of-war's boat under oars than I was, and right well did he judge his distance.

The Englishman was about as close to the wind as he could "lay," and with a word to the crew Blake shot us to windward of him.

There was a lookout, or at least some sort of a man posted at the heel of the schooner's bowsprit, and I saw him wave his arm as a signal to the steersman. Blake saw him as well as I, and called to his crew to "jump her."

There was time only for half a dozen strokes before the schooner's jib-boom shot over our heads.

The rush of foam under her cut water was in our ears, and as we swept past under the overhang of her bow I made a desperate leap into the bowsprit shrouds, catching easily enough and swinging myself up to the rail in a twinkling.

What became of the boat, I did not then know or care, my sole object being to get on board. The man on lookout, luckily for me, had kept himself to leeward so as to be out of sight, and to be partly sheltered behind the windlass-bitts from chance Yankee bullets. Perhaps he would have knocked me on the head, accidentally as it were, if he could have had a chance; but I had one leg over the rail before he could get within swinging distance with a capstan bar, and the persuasive muzzle of a navy revolver reminded him that there was something more than a "paper blockade" in evidence.

He stopped where he stood, but half inclined to make a fight of it, and without paying any further attention to him, I sprang across to the lee side and let fly all the head-sail sheets, which straightway began to slat, lashing their blocks about in such reckless fashion, that the man took to cover without more ado, to save himself from being knocked on the head by the flying tackle.

There were only six or eight men in sight on the main-deck, counting the skipper, who had one side of the wheel, and there were only about a dozen men on board all told. With a revolver at full cock

in one hand and a cutlass in the other, I went aft to the foresail, the crew glancing uneasily at their officers as at me, as much as to say, "Why don't you let us heave this young 'Bantam' over the side?" Reaching the foresail sheet, I let that fly, too, upon which the schooner, having only her spanker left to draw, came up into the wind and began to lose her headway.

Looking about now for the first time, I was immensely relieved to see two Jackies climbing over the weather rail, — for all this had happened probably inside of a minute, — and these two being perhaps more active than their fellows had caught by the fore rigging as the wreck of the cutter swept past. They came quickly across the deck to me, drawing their revolvers, which, by the way, were probably not very trustworthy just then from the wetting they had received. But the three of us marched aft together, bold as need be, and summarily relieved the wheel; that is to say, we drove the skipper and his mate below with small ceremony, they offering no resistance, and took possession in the name of the United States.

With her main-sail trimmed well in, the schooner could only point into the eye of the wind like a weather-vane. So bidding one man keep the crew in awe of his revolver, I sprang to the taffrail accompanied by the other blue-jacket, and glanced astern.

The cutter lay in the vessel's wake, bottom up,

with her side stove in, the howitzer, no doubt, sunk to the bottom, and the men swimming about and keeping afloat as best they might by anything they could lay hold of. Some of the best swimmers were striking out for the schooner; but it was a long swim, for she had shot well up into the wind as she came to, and I feared greatly that their strength would give out before they could cover the distance. The schooner had begun to drift astern, but I was afraid to wait for this slow method of progress, so I helped my remaining man to cut the lashings of the dingy that hung at the stern davits, and drop her into the water. He sprang in as she went down, and sculled away to the rescue.

It took two trips in the dingy to get all hands on board the "Bold Briton," for that was the name of our prize; and then for the first time I breathed freely, for not a man was missing, and we now largely outnumbered the schooner's crew, whom I at once ordered below, and having full possession of the ship had time to look after Nevers, of whom I had caught occasional glimpses, without having really noticed how affairs were going with him.

He was holding his own in the chase, which was not so very strange, considering that the schooner had not more than a foot or two of water under her keel, so that she "carried the whole sound with her," as the saying is, while Nevers in his lighter craft skimmed lightly over the surface. Still the chances

favored the schooner, if she could only keep clear of the shallows, which she was trying her best to do, no doubt, under the skilful management of some local coast pilot.

Nevers was firing at intervals with his little popgun of a howitzer, in the hope of frightening somebody, or by good luck crippling a spar; but they were getting out from under the lee of the island now, and the cutter was feeling the jump of the sea, so that aiming with a howitzer in the bow was difficult.

It was a bad day for blockade-runners, however, and just as I was beginning to wish that Nevers would give it up and come back, his schooner took a "pilot's sheer" that carried her well up to windward, filled away again on her course, and then brought up all standing on a sand-bar that had, no doubt, maintained its allegiance to the United States in spite of the secession of Florida.

Evidently men had been stationed at the sheets, for everything was instantly let go. The fore and main sails came part way down by the run, and were hauled down the rest of the way by main force.

The head-sails were left standing, I suppose, to pull her over the bar as the tide came in, and we could see now, for the first time, that she was going to fight, for sundry little puffs of smoke drifted off to leeward against the blue.

Nevers promptly went about, returning the fire with his carbines, and standing over to take position

directly astern, where he could use shells to best advantage.

Meanwhile, we were drifting down toward the fight and into shoal water, so I let go an anchor, took in the head-sails, and set all hands to work clearing away the long boat for launching so that we could press her into the service in place of our disabled cutter.

This was a job of some magnitude, for the big heavy boat was carefully covered over with tarpaulin, lashed fast so that it would have taken a hurricane to tear her loose, and packed full of all sorts of truck intended for barter and exchange in the Confederacy.

It did not take my Jackies very long to tumble everything out on deck; but to find and rig the heavy and unfamiliar tackles and get the big craft over the side was rather slow work.

I sent two men in the dingy to pick up our masts and sails which we had thrown over so as to have them out of the way just before our encounter with the schooner. The wreck of my cutter had anchored itself when she was stove in and turned over, the anchor fouling the trail rope of the howitzer, and going down with it in some fifteen feet of water.

Nearly all my Jackies had cast loose their side arms and cartridge belts when they found themselves forced to swim, — and small blame to them, — so apart from myself, and the two who had climbed

aboard by the chains, we were practically unarmed. The English skipper did not know this, though he might easily have guessed it had he been a Yankee.

Before this, Nevers had run up to windward of the privateer, out of rifle range, taken in sail, and begun firing his little shells at the enemy, aiming at her cabin windows and making them at least rather uncomfortable below decks; but he was not destined to have things all his own way, for there was evidently a strong crew on board the schooner, and first we knew they had rigged a tackle on a medium-sized brass carronade which must have been mounted amidships, and whipped it up on top of the after-deck-house.

Nevers saw it too, and it was "stern all," while the Johnnies were casting off the hoisting gear and making ready to fire. By the time the puff of smoke came, he was pretty well away, and the shot went skipping by to leeward; but it was evident that the privateer carried far too heavy metal for a ship's cutter, so Nevers prudently gave it up for the time, and pulled for us as the next best thing to do, leaving his late chase safely grounded for the present.

Thus reinforced by a score of well-armed blue-jackets, I took two of them with me for escort, and went below to search for arms and such other matters as might be of interest to me and my superiors. The skipper was English, of course, and was naturally in a rather bad humor; but he was an old blockade-

runner, having made several successful trips, and upon the whole was disposed to take matters philosophically.

He handed over his papers on demand, after having, I suppose, destroyed such as he thought might be of any consequence; and a glance at them told me that my prize was certain to be condemned in any court. So telling him that I should be obliged to keep him and his crew below decks for the present, we rummaged for arms, and found quite a little arsenal in the way of American revolvers and English rifles, — enough at any rate to more than make good the losses we had ourselves sustained.

Taking these on deck, and making a strict search in the forecastle where the schooner's crew was confined, we satisfied ourselves that no more personal arms were in hiding.

About this time, I began to be reminded of breakfast by the state of my own feelings. It has taken some time to tell about this little scrimmage, as far as it has gone, but in point of fact the sun was barely an hour high when Nevers came alongside in No. 2 cutter. It was not till then that it suddenly occurred to all hands that we had started out on this chase with nothing whatever to eat. Upon this, as there was no immediate crisis on hand, we all became ravenously hungry, and were duly grateful to Andy Jackson, one of our black blue-jackets, for having kept up the schooner's galley fire and put the biggest

kettle on to boil without asking leave of anybody.

Indeed, he and some of his special cronies had made a good breakfast, without permission, before the rest of us had even thought of it; and the black rascal came to me now and told me that the "Bold Briton's" cook was an old shipmate of his, and would be willing to cook breakfast for us all for a consideration.

So we had a rattling good breakfast by reliefs, and it was astonishing how light the long boat seemed afterward. The "Bold Briton's" manifest called for an innocent cargo of jute and Sisal hemp; but as her clearance papers declared that she was bound for Boston, I thought it extremely probable that there might be some sort of a mistake in regard to her cargo. Accordingly, I had a section of the main-hatch taken off, and sure enough, there was a beautiful six-gun field battery with the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown and "V. R." stamped on the breach.

CHAPTER XI.

ROYAL ARTILLERY.

Of course Her Most Gracious Majesty did not know anything personally about this particular little transaction, involving some of her own ordnance stores; but certain of her officers must have known about it. Without further ado, we set up a pair of shears over the hatchway, rigged a Spanish tackle in the crotch, and with many a jest all hands tailed onto the falls, and we had one of those guns out on deck and mounted upon its field carriage inside of an hour.

It is one thing to get a gun ready to fire, and quite another thing to fire it. Rummage as we would, there was no ammunition to be found, nothing in the explosive line, that is. There were solid shot in plenty, and empty conical shells, and enough case and canister and grape to stock a small arsenal.

However, the second cutter's ammunition was available, so Nevers had one of his gunners roll four of our cartridges into one and try a shot at our Rebel neighbor. It fell distressingly short, and I did not think it prudent to burn up more of our powder at such a rapid rate, for if we had to con-

sume four howitzer cartridges at each discharge, our little store of ammunition would soon be exhausted.

But the Rebel privateers had not been idle. As soon as Nevers had drawn off with his cutter, they dropped a kedge well up to windward, and began heaving on it so as to be ready to fill away as soon as she floated clear on the rising tide. If we remained at anchor, she could run past within half a mile of us, well knowing that having learned her strength, we would not dare to attack her in broad daylight with our one cutter armed with a ridiculous little howitzer and the big clumsy long boat which, of course, they had seen us launch.

Every minute we were expecting to see her begin to move, when Nevers came running forward with a dozen cartridges in his arms.

"Here we are," he cried, laying the bags down on deck, and throwing something over them. "The 'old man' had them stowed away under his cabin. Gun crew, fall in."

The men sprang to their stations, and in a twinkling had the piece loaded for service with a modern percussion shell, for Nevers had found some fixed ammunition in what I may call the magazine.

He made a fairly good shot, considering it was a range finder, but the Johnnies were already holding the jib up to windward, and had all hands walking away aft with the kedge rope. In a few minutes

more, they had it up to the hawsehole, and she began to pay off and gather way.

"Lay forward there, quartermaster; take half a dozen men, let slip the cable, set the head-sails, stand by fore and main sheets; Mossman, take the wheel."

There was some little tumbling over one another, for we had been too busy to assign regular stations; but with seaman-like adaptiveness every man saw what needed doing, and did it. Most of the men were old sailors, and knew far more about handling sea-going craft than I did; but naval discipline decrees that even a middy, when he is in command, shall be obeyed.

"Get that gun over to the port side, Mr. Nevers. Weather sheets for'ard there; that's good. Let draw"; and the "Bold Briton" began to forge ahead, having the "Gulf Ranger," for that we found was the privateersman's name, on her port quarter.

Just inside the West Pass of Cheecola Sound, the sailing course ranges pretty well south of east for three or four miles, and is a mile or so wide, giving twelve or fifteen feet of water, but defined to the north by a sand-bar which is barely a-wash here and there even at high tide. It was on this bar that the "Ranger" had grounded while manœuvring to get Nevers where he was wanted. The Confederate flag and the rifle shots had, however, put Nevers on his guard, warning him that he had no ordinary blockade-runner to deal with. Had he been less alive to

the situation, he would certainly have lost his boat, and very likely have been captured with his entire crew.

We had ascertained that the "Bold Briton" drew about nine feet of water aft, and by common consent of my oldest blue-jacket the "Ranger," with her centre-board housed, probably did not draw more than five feet. She could therefore easily lead us aground if we came too near.

None of our blockade-runner prisoners would own to being a pilot; the "Master" did his own piloting, so said the crew, and when I appealed to the master, he simply laughed at me. Nothing would have pleased him better than to have his schooner hung up on a sand-bar within reach of a friendly port.

Of course all buoys and channel marks had long since been removed by the Rebels, so I sent a Gloucester fisherman up into the fore crosstrees to keep a lookout for shallows, and trusted the rest to luck.

We were now both of us reaching away on the starboard tack, the "Ranger" considerably astern and to leeward, and the "Bold Briton" steering so as, if possible, to crowd her on to the shallows, or, failing that, to head her off before she could weather the point of the sand-bar where a numerous group of pelicans stood watching our manœuvres and spreading their broad wings to dry in the morning sun.

Telling Nevers to fire whenever he could bring

his piece to bear, I went and stood with Mossman at the wheel. He was a fine specimen of the old-style Yankee man-of-war's man, — they are getting rather scarce in these degenerate days of iron-clad machine-shops, — and he was sailing the "Bold Briton" for all that she was good for.

"That fellow can sail two fathom to our one, sir," said he, "with these two boats towing astern. Couldn't you cast them adrift, sir?"

I had not thought of this, but why should we not? In any event we could not run away from them more than two or three miles. There was one man, for a boat guard, in each boat to look out for her, and bear her off from the schooner when she luffed. It seemed to me that Mossman's advice was sound, so I hailed the men in the boats.

"I am going to cast you adrift; make sail on the long boat and follow me; tow the cutter."

I judged that the men did not fancy this programme very much; but cast off the painters without any more words, and was rewarded with, "Thank you, sir, she steers a sight better now," from Mossman.

We had now ranged up within shooting distance, and Nevers was making very good practice with his new field piece. Considering that his crew had to block the wheels of the carriage with shot-bags to keep the gun from coasting down and knocking the lee bulwarks overboard, he did very well.

But we were nearing the point of the bar now,

and unless we could disable the swift-footed "Ranger," she stood a very good chance of making her escape. The moment she weathered the point she could square away, and lay a straight course for the harbor ten miles off across the sound, which would be very exasperating to us after so nearly catching her.

"Do you think you can run her down?" I asked Mossman.

"I can try, sir; but I misdoubt she'll be rather quick for us."

"Well, try it anyhow."

"Better start the sheets a bit, sir, if you're going to ram."

I gave the necessary orders; the sheets were slacked away a bit, and with accelerated speed the "Bold Briton" with her Yankee crew rushed toward her prey.

But now it was the "Ranger's" turn. We were within reach of her carronades, and she began to pepper us well. Small shot tore through our canvas overhead, and our single field-piece could no longer be brought to bear. I trembled lest something should be shot away, and leave us at her mercy.

Calling another man to stand by Mossman at the wheel in case he should be wounded, I went forward and mustered all hands in the wake of the forecastle.

"Mossman is going to run her down, if he can," I said to Nevers. "I am going to lead the boarders."

Nevers went back to his gun, and I saw him load with canister.

To the men who mustered forward, I said as coolly as I could: "Stand by to board over the lee bow as soon as she strikes. I'll show you the way. Clear the deck with your cutlasses and drive every one below. Now lay low till you get the word."

They needed no warning to lay low, for the last shot from the "Ranger" had gone clear through the forecastle, wounding two or three men, while our English prisoners began to pound on the hatch and howl to be let out.

I had to stand up more or less to see where we were, and very soon became aware that there were Southern riflemen not far off on the watch for just such game as I, so I did not scruple to get behind the foremast and take advantage of such shelter as I could find.

Our gun crew, however, were using their carbines under Nevers's direction, and still Mossman steadily held his course till, in my excitement, I thought he was going to run across the "Ranger's" bows.

Nearer, nearer, till I could see the strands in her rigging, till I could see the bronzed faces of the grim gunners, as they ran their carronades out for the last time, aiming low with the evident intention of wounding us between wind and water.

Some of our fellows peppered away with their

revolvers, and must have made it rather warm along the "Ranger's" weather rail.

Then there came an instant when every sailorman on both ships knew that the time had come. I glanced aft; Mossman was crowding the helm down; his mate was slacking the main-sheet so as to let her fall off quicker.

The "Ranger's" fore rigging caught our jib-boom, and snapped it off like a jackstraw. She was under full headway, probably doing her eight or nine knots, and it took but a second for our figure-head to crash through her bulwarks.

"Boarders away! follow me, all 'Bantams'!" And a score of blue-jackets swarmed over the rail, leaped down upon the slanting deck, with swinging cutlasses and a ringing Yankee cheer. Twenty men make quite a formidable show on the deck of a little schooner. Fully that number were ready for us with spiteful revolvers that stung like hornets, and three or four of my men fell at the first fire.

I do not in the least remember what I did until I found myself standing on the after deck-house, with a broken cutlass in my hand, my cap gone, tunic half torn off, and somebody tumbling headlong down the companionway.

Two Jackies had a tall fellow down, and were tying his arms behind him, and others were reloading their revolvers. Such of the "Ranger's" crew as had not been hurt or killed had been driven below,

and we were masters of the deck. But what a mess the two schooners were in, to be sure!

Our sharp bows had crushed in the "Ranger's" side, just abaft the fore rigging, both our topmasts had been carried away with the shock of collision, and a tangle of blocks and cordage hung overhead.

The "Bold Briton" had struck nearly at right angles, cutting the "Ranger" down almost to the water's edge, and then losing her own headway, had slowly backed out and swung around under the pressure of her sails, till the two vessels were now side by side. Both were still drawing ahead a little from their former headway, though they were not at all under control. They were slowly obeying the instinct that leads every properly rigged vessel, when left to her own devices, to come up into the wind and stand still.

As soon as I was satisfied that resistance was at an end, as far as the privateersmen were concerned, I looked about for Nevers, and was much relieved at seeing him seated upon a carronade, looking rather dazed, but otherwise apparently all right. He and his gun crew had joined the boarders, as the schooners swung together, and he had been hit over the head with the butt of a rifle.

CHAPTER XII.

A HOSTILE STEAMER.

Bidding him take charge of the "Ranger" with the second cutter's crew, I ordered my own men back on board the "Bold Briton," and at once sounded the well. She was making no water of any consequence, so the kedge anchor was let go, and the "Ranger" presently drifted away, carrying with her part of our top hamper which had become entangled with her standing rigging.

Before she was out of hail, Nevers sung out that he was sinking, adding that he would run her aground, which he accordingly did, fetching up some hundred yards astern of us, where he and his men were perfectly safe, as he could not possibly sink any farther even if he tried.

We all went to work at once, clearing away the wreckage on the "Bold Briton," and repairing damages. In an hour, we had the broken topmasts and jib-boom out of the way, and their stays and standing rigging stopped where it could readily be accessible for the new spars that would be set up sometime.

Nevers and his men were busy, meanwhile, in making the wounded comfortable, furling the sails,

and cutting away such raffle as threatened to do damage.

Hardly was this accomplished when the lookout aloft hailed the deck with the unwelcome announcement of a steamer coming off from the mainland. A few minutes later we could make her out from the deck. She might be merely on a reconnoitring expedition, or she might be armed; anyhow, we were at a disadvantage where we lay. So, as our boats had come up, we got the "Ranger's" crew into the long boat, towing her astern as the easiest way of keeping them under perfect control, transferred our own wounded to the "Bold Briton," and got under way long before the steamer came within range. I thought it no more than right to leave the wounded privateersmen, of whom there were eight or ten, to be cared for by their own people.

The wind still held true, and we stood over toward our last night's camp and anchored bow and stern so that we could command the approach from the sound with our field-piece.

In the course of an hour, the steamer was alongside the "Ranger." She was a river craft of moderate size, with a high-pressure engine and carried a gun forward behind a little lunette of cotton bales. Evidently she was not a match for us in weight of metal, but her compliment of men largely outnumbered ours. With characteristic Southern bravado, she headed for us after inspecting the "Ranger," and

came full speed, as though intending to run us down and carry us by boarding.

Not knowing how many men she might have on board concealed in her cabin, I thought it wise to stand her off. Nevers was a born artillerist, having carried off the honors of his class at the Academy for ball practice, and he was only too eager to try the range of what our men had already dubbed the "Royal Artillery."

"Sight for fifteen hundred yards," he said to his gunner; "she's a good two thousand now," he added to me, "but I don't want to scare her too much the first time."

Our schooner "we-wawed" a little in spite of her two anchors, and a full minute passed before the sights tallied with the target. Then Nevers jerked the lock-string with that nicety of judgment that marks the accomplished artillerist, and smoke obscured everything for an instant, rolling directly down toward the steamer. From the deck, we could not see where the shot struck, but the lookout aloft reported, —

"Jumped clean over her, sir, a little to windward."

The hint was not sufficient; the steamer came straight on, and tried a shot with his gun, which was nearly spent before it reached us.

Nevers was ready again in short order, and this time sent a shot through the upper works, knocking splinters high in air and driving a crowd of men

out upon the upper deck and paddle-boxes. It must have done some damage to the machinery, too, for her paddles stopped revolving and she lost headway, swinging round and presenting her broadside, such a fair mark that Nevers assured me that he could sink her with three shots more.

However, the second shot convinced the officer in command that we had best be let alone with the artillery then at his disposal, and as his engines were presently started again, he was able to limp out of range, with an elbow in his smokestack and something apparently wrong with his starboard paddle-wheel.

He did not fail, however, to notice the buoy that we had left when we slipped our cable. He picked it up with the anchor attached, as also the wreck of our first cutter with its valued howitzer and other appurtenances. It was highly exasperating to see him go leisurely about this errand, keeping well out of range, and taking his time to pick up anything that he could see that was worth saving. He lay for some time alongside the wreck of the "Ranger," transferring to the steamer all the killed and wounded, as well as everything of value that was readily movable. I expected that he would blow her up; but I suppose he had not quite the heart to do it, and thinking, perhaps, that we could be prevented in some way from destroying her.

At last, defiantly firing a farewell shot at us from

far beyond any possible range, he headed for home.

All over the wide sound there was not a sail in sight, and still the Gulf breeze blew merrily across the island. Dinner was in course of preparation. Nevers had a gang at work getting another of Her Majesty's field-pieces up out of the hold and putting it in order of battle, and three or four of our best riggers were patching the shot-holes in our sails and completing the hasty repairs that had been made just after the encounter with the "Ranger." For the first time, I had leisure to remember poor Gordon, whom I had been forced to leave grievously wounded and probably dead by now on the seaward slope of the sand dunes at early dawn.

I had not even found time to examine the papers that I had taken from his pockets, although I confess that I had snatched an instant, when no one was looking, to open the gold locket that he wore about his neck, just to see if it was any one that I knew. It was, as I anticipated, an exquisitely painted miniature of Miss Helen Tolliver.

The reader may, perhaps, remember how my little canine friend Wag brought me a certain dainty pocket handkerchief for a keepsake on board the "Palma." This I had faithfully carried ever since — let us say for good luck — in the inner pocket of my tunic. Thinking this same pocket a safe and appropriate place for the miniature with the handkerchief,

I felt there, but to my dismay found it empty. The handkerchief was gone, and I am ashamed to say that I was quite cast down for a time by its mysterious disappearance.

The reader understands, I hope, that I had gone through Gordon's pockets partly from a sense of duty, and partly from friendliness to him. He might be the bearer of important orders or despatches. I had no choice but to leave him where he lay at the time, and run for it, and the only friendly service possible was to save his valuables from possible marauders, which I had accordingly done. Among the official papers were his commission as a first lieutenant of cavalry, signed by Jefferson Davis, an order detailing him as signal officer, and directing him to report for duty to General Lidell, then commanding the Eastern District of the Gulf Coast for the Confederates, with headquarters at Mobile. There were also some secret instructions in cipher which I could not read.

Duty and inclination alike urged me to make a reconnoissance, bring in or bury my old schoolmate's body, and find out, if I could, where were the remainder of the signal corps.

I had refrained from questioning the two prisoners, who had been taken when Gordon was shot, guessing that they would not talk; but I now interviewed the "Bold Briton's" cook, who seemed rather disposed to be friendly, and was at work in the galley

with an assistant from the crew, for whose help he had asked.

After pretending to inspect the rations, — as is always the custom in the navy, — I asked, "Who is your best sea lawyer among the crew? Of course you've got two or three."

The cook and his mate grinned. "Tom Barney's one, for sure, sir; and you may call Liverpool Bill a good second."

I thanked them, and sent for the two men. They came, escorted by a Jacky, and taking them separately, I offered them the freedom of the ship during good behavior, and further reward if they would tell me what the two Rebel prisoners had been talking about while confined in the forecastle. Their stories agreed well enough to the effect that the party had consisted of Gordon with four men detailed to patrol the beach, watch for Yankee cruisers, and help blockade-runners, setting signals for their guidance and warning. Their camp, they said, was in the hammock near the eastern end of the island. They repeated, besides, a lot of characteristic Confederate brag, about how many Yankees they had killed, and how many more they could "lick," and so on, which my informants evidently accepted for what it was worth.

After this interview I went aloft and took a careful survey with the schooner's best spyglass all around the compass. There was nothing in sight

that looked in the least threatening, so after dinner, leaving Nevers in charge, I took four men in the dingy, with the most trusty looking of the soldier prisoners, and landed on the beach within easy rifle range of our friends on board.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BURIAL PARTY.

While we were pulling ashore, I notified my prisoner that I was going to make him walk in front of me, and that if anybody fired upon us, I should shoot him dead instantly. He said nothing at the time, but after landing, stood looking down and working the toe of his boot in the sand, as if meditating. "Say, stranger," he finally asked, "what'll you do if I won't go?"

"Handcuff you to a tree here, and leave you till we come back." And I extracted a pair of steel bracelets of English make from my pocket to show that I was fully prepared to carry out the programme.

"Well, if you'll give me a white handkercher on a stick, I reckon I can keep the boys from a-pickin' of you off. Anyhow, I'll chance it. But, stranger, I shan't guide you nowheres, nor tell you nothin'."

"All right. I'm not asking you," said I.

So we started off through the dense undergrowth to find our way first to the picket post of the night before, and thence to where I expected to find Gordon's body. After toilsomely pushing our way

through palmetto scrub for a few rods, the soldier stopped.

"Say, stranger," he said, "I reckon I know where you want to go to. They's a good trail a little piece to the left o' this yer."

"Is there? Well, suppose you show it to us."

He turned short to the left, and brought us in a few minutes to a narrow trail through which we could advance with comparative ease.

"I don't mind telling you that I'm on the way to bury Lieutenant Gordon."

"Was the leftenant killed, for sure?" he asked, after walking a short distance.

"I think so. I couldn't stop to find out for certain. He was a schoolmate of mine up North, before the war."

"Sho! You don't tell me. I'm right smart sorry you shot him."

"So am I; but it couldn't be helped. He would have had me next crack, if my man hadn't dropped him."

"That's so, stranger. I'm sort o' glad you didn't do it yourself, though. I don't reckon he wouldn't like to be killed by an old schoolmate of his."

For my life I could not help smiling at the quaint double negative, and the queer mixture of ideas suggested by this remark. Did he mean that if Gordon could have foreseen the fatal meeting, he would not have wanted me to shoot him, if the shooting had

to be done anyhow; or did he mean that looking back from another world, Gordon would experience a certain regret at having met his death by the hand of a schoolmate? The question was too deep for me to answer, so I said by way of keeping up my end of the talk: "No, I suppose not. I am sure if I am going to be killed in a scrimmage, I'd rather have it done by some one I don't know than by an old playfellow like Mr. Gordon, for instance."

"I reckon it's all a matter o' taste, stranger," said the soldier; "now I knew two brothers in the Carlina mountings onct that married gals that belonged to families that had a long-standin' feud betwixt them. Well, naterally them two brothers had to take up with their wives' families; the gals wouldn't hear to nuthin' else, so they told each other good-by down to the corner store the evenin' of the day they was gettin' married, and Bill says, 'Jo,' says he, 'I'm right smart glad we are goin' to be across the branch from each other. It won't seem so lonesome to know there's a chance of bein' held up fraternal like.' 'Bill,' says Jo, 'put it there,' says he, holdin' out his hand. 'I'm your man, Jo, let's do it harnsome while we're about it.' So they shook, and afore the honeymoons was over the old feud broke out lively ag'in, and them two brothers hunted each other faithful all through the mountings more nor a month."

"Did they ever find each other?" I asked.

"Well, it ain't rightly known. 'Pears like they

ought to have met, bein' both good hunter men, but they didn't somehow. They was both of um wounded bad the same day; but there was quite a general scrimmage that day down to the cross roads, and nobody could tell who hit who. They both claimed it was them, though, and the end of it was that the women folks patched up a peace betwixt them, and the feud was buried for evermore. For as much as two year before the war broke out them families was good friends, and now the men folks is all in the war on the one side or the other so there cayn't be no fightin' to home, not of no account."

While I was wondering whether such a code of honor could possibly exist anywhere in our land, we reached the edge of the timber, and after a hasty, comprehensive glance around, asking me to halt my men for a moment, our guide went forward carrying the little white flag of truce, so that it could be readily seen. I looked apprehensively toward the ridge of the sand dunes, and noted with a sickening sensation that two buzzards were circling slowly above the very spot where I judged Gordon's body lay.

We walked on toward the place in silence, for a few seconds, then said the guide shortly, "I reckon he's done for, sir."

I was conscious of a singular reluctance to proceed, as we neared the crest, and even the rough-mannered

Confederate soldier drew the sleeve across his eyes and halted.

"I reckon there ain't no danger here, stranger," he said, facing me; "suppose you go first." But so strongly did I shrink from the expected sight beyond the ridge that I shirked it, and ordered one of my men to reconnoitre.

He obeyed without hesitation, not being troubled with any personal sentiment in the matter. Ascending to the sandy ridge, where we had surprised the three Rebels in the morning, he looked over, shaded his eyes from the glare of the sun, and turning to me called out, "Blest if he ain't alive yet, sir." And forgetting our order of march, the rest of us all scrambled up together.

There was poor Gordon lying back against the heap of sand where I had left him in the morning. He had his drawn sword in his hand, and was feebly making passes at a huge buzzard that stood hissing with wide-spread wings and hideous lowered crest close in front of him. Another one lay dead a little further down the slope, having evidently fallen a victim to Gordon's blade.

Shaking his flag of truce, our guide dashed forward with a genuine Rebel yell. The great vulture gave one or two awkward hops, till he "got way on," and then spreading his broad pinions to their fullest extent sailed off down toward the beach and round a shoulder of the sand dunes out of sight, casting back

at us a vengeful glance over his wing as if to say, "I'll pick your bones yet, my hearties."

The Rebel soldier and I reached the wounded man's side almost at the same moment. He had swooned and dropped his sword on hearing our cries; but the soldier fanned him with his broad sombrero, and some sea water sprinkled in his face soon brought him to, though he was evidently very much reduced from loss of blood and long exposure in the sun. We had some morsels of food in our haversacks, however, and when he had managed to swallow these, with some cold coffee from our canteens, he was braced up wonderfully.

I now bethought me to station a lookout on the highest bluff near by, and it was lucky that I did, for he presently called me and pointed to two moving dots away down the beach to the eastward. My glass showed them to be two horsemen cantering along with the easy lope of Confederate cavalry, and following the hard level beach in our direction. They were still a long way off, and I had plenty of time, leaving Randolph to the care of his man, to make my dispositions to capture them if possible. The soldier, I was sure, would not desert his wounded officer, and as he had only a sword available, he was practically harmless.

I reasoned that the two men were coming to join their comrades, and that they would leave their horses somewhere to ascend the dunes on foot. The

total length of the island on which we were campaigning is little short of thirty miles, so that none of the firing need necessarily have been heard at the Rebel camp, wherever that might have been.

My Jackies were "ambushed" where they could command the path with the carbines. Presently, we heard the distant whinnying of a horse, which was answered by one considerably nearer, coming apparently from the edge of the hammock. Probably the men were accustomed to leave their horses at a certain place, and these would no doubt follow the usual custom. There was more whickering when the horses came together, and from my place of concealment I could see two gray slouch hats advancing through the scrub. When the right moment came, I whistled, and up jumped my four Jackies with carbines levelled at very close quarters indeed.

"Up hands," I commanded, and taken completely by surprise, the Rebs had no choice but to surrender and make the best of it.

After disarming and pinioning my new prisoners, I went back to Gordon, who had been considerably refreshed by what he had eaten, and was asleep from sheer exhaustion under a palmetto screen which his attendant had set up. The soldier motioned me to keep still, and joining me at a little distance from the wounded man asked what had happened, for the capture had been effected out of his sight, though scarcely more than an eighth of a mile dis-

tant. He shook his head sadly, when I told him that his comrades were taken. "I reckon you Yanks is too many for us," he said. "You needn't feel no more consarn; there ain't another human critter on this yer island except the nigger cook up to our camp. The leftenant will tell you so when he wakes up. He's doin' first rate, breathin' regular, but that's an awful bad hurt he's got. I wish there was a surgeon aboard."

"Well, you stay here and look out for him while I see about the horses."

"Say, stranger," he said, hailing me as I turned to go. "Mine's a little sorrel mare with a switch tail; be good to her, won't ye?"

CHAPTER XIV.

"JACKY" ON HORSEBACK.

LEAVING one man as a guard, the other three Jackies went with me, and following the footpath through the scrub, we soon came to where five horses were tied to the low-spreading branches of live oaks. They were eagerly pricking their ears toward the sound of our approaching footsteps. All save one were rather under-sized, of the wiry but serviceable breed common in the South. The fifth, a Kentucky thoroughbred, was doubtless Gordon's own mount. They all had their saddles and bridles on, for all had been left by their owners without anticipating a long absence. Three of them, even to our nautical eyes, were evidently under some excitement, and had pawed great holes in the sand, and tugged at the lariats with which they were fastened.

We four mariners stood somewhat aghast at the prospect. I had been on horseback once or twice when I was a very small boy, but knew much better how to handle a ship in a gale of wind than I did about the management even of a very placid cavalry charger.

"Any of you know about horses?" I asked carelessly.

The three tars looked helplessly at me and at each other.

"I was raised on a farm in Varmount, sir," said one; "but I ain't tetched a horse since I was a kid."

"No, sir, I always steer clear of 'em," said another.

"I used to drive our folks to meeting sometimes," remarked the third.

Clearly, there were going to be difficulties in mustering my sailor-lads in as cavalrymen, and I considered for a moment the expediency of calling in our Confederate prisoners to get the cavalcade started, but I did not quite dare to risk it.

So putting a bold face on the matter, I went cautiously up to the little sorrel mare, who looked to be the least dangerous of the five, cast loose her bowline, and towed her carefully out from under the trees into the open. "Dick," I said, "fetch that gray one alongside of this one just as I did, and lash the two of them together with these lines."

The coils of line referred to were the lariats, usually of rawhide, which Southern cavalrymen habitually carried at their saddle bows.

Dick was the boy who said he had been raised on a farm. I selected him to drive the double team, as having had the most experience of any one in my little detachment.

The other two men chose steeds, and after much trouble managed to climb aboard. Telling them to follow Dick's lead, I turned with some secret perturbation to the handsome bay, with the McClellan saddle on his back, that still remained. While I was rubbing his nose, and trying to make him think that I knew what I was about, an uproar arose behind me.

"Hey, Dicky, bear a hand here. I forgot to cast off her painter." Sure enough, there was the sailorman bareheaded, hanging on for dear life to the roll of blankets that was strapped to the cantle of the saddle. His cutlass was slapping against the horse's side, and his loaded revolver danced recklessly about at the end of its lanyard.

The horse, with ears laid back, was throwing his full weight on the halter that still remained fast to the live oak.

Dicky had all he could do to manage his double team. So I ran to the man's assistance; but before I could reach him, it occurred to the horse that kicking might be more effectual than pulling, and up went his heels. The sudden reversal was too much for Jacky, who went over his head, and came down in a blue heap on the sand.

He picked himself up, none the worse for the fall, and shook his fist in the horse's face in a way that seemed to have a quieting effect, and we were able between us to cast off the "painter," coil it away

after a fashion, and get Jacky mounted once more.

Meanwhile, Dick had used up the whole of his two five-fathom rawhide lariats in lashing his two animals side by side, but he made a very seaman-like job of it, and we were all proud of him.

"You ought to board the port horse, Dicky," ventured the man who had driven the folks to meeting.

"I'm going to use the starboard gangway now I've got a chance," replied Dicky, as he climbed into his seat by the starboard stirrup leathers, and the cavalcade moved off, leaving me to follow with the Kentucky thoroughbred.

Left alone with this high-spirited animal, I felt my courage rapidly oozing out, but there was nothing for it, so I patted him, and called him pet names, and he rubbed his velvet nose against my cheek and asked me for a drink of water in horse talk, which I did not understand. However, I loosed his halter with great deliberation and essayed to mount.

How high the stirrup seemed above the ground! I got my right foot into it after some trouble, only to discover that I was on the wrong side of the horse, if I intended to face in the same direction that he did. How glad I was that nobody had seen me!

"Kentucky," for that was his name, glanced pityingly at me, but suffered himself to be led alongside a fallen tree-trunk, and I found myself at last astride

his back, facing forward and ready to get under way.

He was no doubt very thirsty, as were also his less aristocratic but more patient fellows. But human companionship had a restraining effect, I suppose, and he responded gently enough to my "get up," walking rapidly after the others, and making me feel as though an earthquake was in progress beneath me. But as soon as we came in sight of the rest of the party, he perhaps scented the water of the run from beyond the ridge, for he shook his head violently, cavorted a bit, and broke into a canter that utterly demoralized his rider in no time.

I lost first one stirrup and then the other, but thanks to Gordon's rolled overcoat and blankets I could not very easily fall overboard, and so dashed by the rest of the mounted contingent at what I suppose a horseman would call an easy lope, but which was to me something really terrific.

"Get a hold of the reins, sir," shouted Dicky, as we passed him. But how could I let go of anything to get hold of anything else, especially of the reins, which I now discovered pretty well up on the horse's neck in the vicinity of his ears. No, my only safety lay in keeping my grip on the blanket straps fore and aft; but the passing of Kentucky was too much for the others. One and all, they started after him. The two single horsemen fell off at the first jump, but Dicky held on like a good one, and Kentucky

lengthened his stride as he heard the tumult behind him.

"Ben Hur" had not been written then, but I have always thought that the author must have had some such experience as mine, or he could never have written that famous description of the chariot race. Up the incline we went, passed the amazed Confederates under guard with their elbows pinioned behind them. These shouted something as we passed, but I could not hear what it was. Over the ridge we went pell-mell, Kentucky still ahead, and Dicky with his double team a good second, while the two riderless steeds followed behind. Then we turned into a trail, which led I knew not whither; palmetto leaves cut and pricked my face, branches threatened to sweep me from the saddle; then came a downward pitch and one splash quickly followed by another.

The first one was caused by Kentucky's forefeet, as he brought up fetlock deep in the water of the run, and the second splash was merely Acting Midshipman Benson, U. S. N., who sat him down in water some eighteen inches deep, a little farther out from shore.

I struggled to my feet in time to witness Dicky's arrival, which was effected in great style. For his fasts held through the whole race, and as he had fallen inboard, as it were, partly between the two horses, he was able to accomplish a sort of double-

back circus act, holding on by the knotted lariats, and not even going over his horses' heads when they brought up in the shallow water, and went to drinking with their heads down.

The horses were merely thirsty, not frightened, and after a long drink suffered themselves to be led quietly back to their masters, who with preternatural gravity, but evident amusement, gave us advice as to their further treatment.

Gordon was awake when I again reached him, and was so far himself that he could smile when he saw me. I had to put my ear close to hear him whisper, "I nearly did for you that time, Jack; but your man had the drop on me."

The soldier and I now examined his wounds more carefully than we had ventured to do before, and found that with the aid of the handkerchief that I had stuffed into it, it had staunched itself, though how much internal hæmorrhage had taken place, we had no means of knowing. It was, at any rate, a very ugly looking hurt, but apparently not so bad as it seemed, or he would have breathed his last long ago. While we were looking him over, he spied a pair of shovels that I had ordered brought, and which had been accidentally thrust into the sand near by.

"What are those for?" he whispered, pointing at them.

"I brought them along, thinking we might want to entrench," I answered evasively.

"Came ashore to bury me, did you? Much obliged, I am sure." This last with a comical drawl, that, taken with the weakness of the speaker, made me smile in spite of myself. For his mind was evidently wandering a little. "Not quite yet, old man; not quite yet. Maybe I'll hit you next time. I've tried it twice, now; third turn always does it, you know. I say, Jack, there ought to be a little gold locket somewhere here; I don't seem to feel it." And his hand wandered feebly about over his flannel shirt.

"It's safe, Haines. I took it off this morning, when I thought you — for safe keeping, you know."

He looked up at me, and suddenly the good humor went out of his eye like a flash. He half raised himself to feel in the breast pocket of his coat. "The papers," he asked, "where are they?"

"Now don't you distress yourself, Gordon. I have tied up your private letters, and nobody has seen them. You shall have them back by and by. We must get you aboard ship as soon as we can. When you're a little stronger, you can have your papers."

By this time, he had remembered himself sufficiently to realize that he must not show too much anxiety. So he subsided, and we set about providing some means to carry him. I was for making a stretcher with a blanket; but the soldiers knew a much better plan. There was an axe hanging to one of the saddles, and we quickly cut down two slender bay trees, trimming off the lower limbs and

lashing the stems one on each side of his little sorrel mare. A spreader was then thrust across and through the two trees where they rested on the ground, and there was an admirable litter good for several miles of travel — moved by horse power, too, which was a great point in its favor. We spread blankets over the branches; Gordon lay quite comfortably on them, and the little mare walked off with her load as though the weight were nothing at all.

We had learned that it was easier for sailormen to lead horses than to ride them, so our little procession strung out quite a length, and made such a noise coming through the scrub that Nevers, on board the schooner, felt some uneasiness as to the character of the approaching party.

We got Gordon on board without trouble, unsaddled and tethered the horses under Confederate supervision, where they could, if they chose, nibble at a strip of grass that had sprung up just inside the beach.

CHAPTER XV.

A LOW BAROMETER.

I WENT aloft as soon as I could, and took another careful survey of our surroundings. There was no sign either of the "Bantam" or any other craft, and the weather began to look decidedly "dirty" offshore. I had encountered one or two West Indian hurricanes during my two years' experience off the South Atlantic coast, and on consulting some of my older blue-jackets, I found that they had been "a-smellin' of a storm all day." The barometer, too, was falling, and as night was now coming on, it behooved us to make everything as snug as might be.

I could not have asked for a more secure anchorage, protected as it was from the Gulf by the wooded island, and from the sound by sand-bars which broke the force of the waves; it was almost impossible that any offshore sea could rise of sufficient weight to cause us trouble, no matter from which direction the wind might come.

For a youngster, I had enough to be anxious about. Undoubtedly, the Confederates on the mainland were marshalling their forces to attack me, recapture the "Bold Briton," and avenge the sinking of the

"Ranger." They were within easy reach of Mobile, where there was a strong garrison, and they could certainly get together plenty of men to carry us by boarding, once they were alongside. What resources they could command in the way of boats, I had no means of knowing; but there were plenty of stories current in the fleet about certain highly efficient, light-draught "tin-clads," already afloat, as well as about the big and invulnerable ram "Tennessee." At any rate, my best policy was to prevent them, by all means in my power, from getting alongside.

The steamer that we had so easily driven off in the afternoon might come perilously near at night, towing a fleet of barges or small boats, which we could hardly hope to stand off during the hours of darkness. Again, a landing might be effected on the island, guns posted on the bluffs commanding our anchorage, and we should either have to surrender or take to our boats if we could not make sail and run away.

But then there was the gray-streaked sky, the falling barometer, and the weather-wise opinion of the old shellbacks on board, to the effect that a storm was brewing. It might turn out to be a hard blow, although the opening of the hurricane season was not scheduled for several weeks to come. Should such a storm arise, however, it was a positive guarantee against any attack from the mainland during its continuance.

Nevers and I made a thorough inspection to see that everything was properly secured. Of course the two old quartermasters were far better qualified than we were to snug down a ship for a hurricane; but it was the proper thing for naval officers to do, and least of all should young middies neglect such duties.

We bent on a spare hawser to the stern cable, and carried it forward outside of the rigging, so that if we had to let her swing head to sea during the night, we should have two anchors to hold her. The "Royal Artillery" was loaded with canister and securely lashed amidships with tarpaulin bonnets stopped over the vents, primers in place, and lanyards ready to jerk.

About sundown the horses began whinnying, Kentucky stamping impatiently, and looking toward the schooner with his long ears pricked up as if expecting some attention. Half the crew were hanging over the rail, and speculating as to what they wanted. It never occurred to any of us that they were thirsty again, until Gordon's nurse came on deck and told us what was the matter. Then I sent three Jackies ashore in the dingy with a bucket of fresh water for each horse. The soldiers asked me to let the animals go free, but I was unwilling to do this, lest they might prove useful to the enemy, should he land a force on the island. Besides, it seemed to me that if I could capture a small herd of Confederate cavalry horses, and turn

them over to the shore station, it would be quite a feather in my cap.

The wind began to pipe up as darkness fell, and it was blowing a full gale by eight bells of the first watch. I suppose that no young sailorman on his first independent command ever welcomed a hurricane more heartily than I did that night. In the face of such a gale, driving on shore and lashing the broad bay into foam, no mortal craft could cross from the mainland, and I was perfectly sure of a quiet night, so far as concerned the Southern Confederacy.

The only doubt in my mind was whether there might not be more of a force already on the island than our Confederate prisoners were disposed to acknowledge. Even if such were the case, however, they would find it rather difficult to do us any harm on such a night and under such existing conditions.

The crews of the two cutters divided our complement of men conveniently into port and starboard watches, and of course Nevers and I made it watch and watch alternately, "sleeping with our boots on," as the saying is, between watches.

During his watch Nevers shook me awake with the information that the wreck of the "Ranger" was on fire, and that he had called the men to quarters. Tired as we were, all hands stood on deck, even after they were dismissed from stations, to watch the conflagration. An interview with the

"Ranger's" late commander, whom I awakened from a sound sleep to communicate the news, brought out the information that "he reckoned the sea had got up so as to set off some barrels of quick-lime that were lashed on deck."

This was probably the true explanation of the fire. At any rate, she lighted up the storm-swept bay for something like two hours. The magazine was no doubt drowned out, or else our Confederate friends had emptied it of ammunition, for we waited in vain for an explosion, and at last the red glare died out, and darkness settled down once more upon the deep.

I had been too busy to look after my old schoolmate since seeing him safely bestowed on a mattress in the cabin, but shortly after the last fitful flare-up of the "Ranger's" timbers, the Confederate soldier nurse came on deck in search of me, saying that Gordon wanted to see me. As soon as we were in the shelter of the companionway he spoke: "Hold on, stranger; I want to tell you before you go down that the leftenant's been out of his head rather bad. But he's bled a heap, and I'm afeard he ain't goin' to pull through. He's been talkin' wild-like about some of his folks, and about the times when I expect you and him was school-boys together at the North. He's just woke up clear headed now, and I suspicion that's rather a bad sign, though I ain't much of a doctor myself."

There was no need of my staying on deck, so I threw off my oilers and sat down on the floor beside Haines's mattress. He had dropped off to sleep again, while we were talking, but presently he started, opened his big dark eyes, bright with fever.

"Ah! What's that?" as a great roaring gust of wind smote the schooner, making her rigging sing, and heeling her over at her moorings. "Ah, how it smarts! Oh yes, I remember now. I was shot, wasn't I?" And he looked at me with a little more intelligence dawning in his eyes.

"Yes, Haines," I said.

"Oh, that you, Jack Benson? Mr. Midshipman Benson, U. S. N., — Lieutenant Haines Gordon, C. S. A. Two Rockledge boys; sounds rather well, don't it? Anyhow, I outrank you, old man. Where's Helen? I want to see Helen. Orderly, orderly, give my compliments to Miss Helen. Let's see, where was I?" and, closing his eyes, he seemed once more to recover a hold upon his wavering reason.

"Pardon me, Jack; I was talking wild just now, wasn't I? Yes? Well, my head's clearer. I don't know how long it will last. I reckon you've done for me. I think I must be bleeding inside. Once in a while it seems as if I could feel something trickle between my ribs. Will you shake hands with a dying Rebel, Jack? Of course you will. I knew you would, even if it were only for old times.

I tried to kill you this morning, didn't I? Came pretty near doing it, too, but I'm glad I didn't, now: it wouldn't have done any good. What's one Yankee middy, more or less!

"Do you know, Jack, since I've been lying here a-dying, I've had the strangest visions. It has come home to me what an awful, awful mistake the South made when she seceded. She meant well, and thought it was right; but, look at it any way you will, even if it were divinely right, it was an awful, awful blunder. I seem to see now what it is to be when all is over, years hence, perhaps; half a million of dead men, most of them young; the South, my beautiful, sunny South, impoverished and desolate; King Cotton dethroned, England mistress of the seas, American progress set back a hundred years, and all for what, — nothing, I'm afraid, nothing at all. It was a mania, a wild, cruel mania that led us into it. I can see it now, when it is all too late. But we've made a jolly good fight of it, haven't we, Jack?"

"Indeed, you have, Haines; nobody can deny that."

"I used to believe, what our fire-eating editors told us, that one Southerner could whip five Yankees, but it isn't so; Jack, we can't whip more than three, or three and a half of you."

In serio-comic vein the poor fellow wandered on, now dozing for a few seconds, now waking with his

mind clear, but seeing visions even as he talked. The Confederate soldier sat dejectedly on a sea-chest, with his elbows on his knees, and his head resting on his hands. Some perception of the strange picturesqueness of the situation came to me, even then and there. The little cramped cabin, the hurricane shrieking through the rigging overhead, the proud, gallant, handsome young Southern prince, heir to a thousand acres of deep cotton land, master of some hundreds of slaves; the "poor white" soldier, ignorant, illiterate, but brave and faithful, and having a vote on questions of national importance, just as good as anybody's; the Yankee fisherman's son, lawful captor, and for the time absolute despot, boy though he was, of the ship and all that she contained. It needed only the entrance of the black cook to complete the rôle of persons represented in the tremendous farce-tragedy of civil war that was enacting with the negro slave for one of its central figures.

Of course I did not think of all this then, but the picturesqueness of it comes forcibly back to me now.

"Jack," said Haines, in one of his lucid intervals, "you have some papers of mine, haven't you?"

"Yes, here they are, just as I found them." And I extracted the package of personal letters from my pocket, hoping that they would divert his mind from the others; but the friendly ruse was of no avail.

"Thanks," he said, holding them in his hand. "I

won't look at them. Send them to my cousin Helen when you have a chance; I know they're all right. The other papers, I suppose, are the legitimate spoils of war. I wish I could get you to destroy them, but I know you can't do that in honor. I'd like to have the locket again, if you don't mind."

"Shall I open it for you?" I asked, after he had made one or two ineffectual attempts.

He handed it to me without a word, and pressing the spring, I gave it back to him open. He held out his hand. "Good-by, Jack," he said, the tears welling up in his eyes and running down his cheeks for pure weakness. "Good-by; I think I'm nearly gone. See the girls again sometime, and give them my love, and if you can, I wish you'd bury me under the big palmetto just at the head of the run here."

I promised and turned hastily away, making an excuse to go on deck. When I came back after a few minutes, he had turned a little on his side, and placed the packet of letters so that his cheek rested upon them and upon the locket that he held in his left hand. He had passed quietly away while I was gone, and not even his watchful attendant knew that he had breathed his last. As we straightened his limbs on the blanket that was to be his winding-sheet, I found myself instinctively rearranging his disordered clothing, with some sort of dim notion that he ought to be made smart and soldierly for a last mysterious muster.

I was about to button the close-fitting gray cavalry jacket under his chin, when the embroidered corner of a pocket handkerchief caught my eye. It was the one that I had stuffed into his wound in the morning of the day before. Looking at it more closely, I read "Helen" in silken letters, and I buttoned the jacket over his breast with her red-stained pocket handkerchief close to his heart.

When I had hastily tried to staunch his wound in the morning, I had quite inadvertently snatched from the pocket of my own tunic the keepsake that had come into my possession during the voyage of the "Palma." It was the one that my little four-footed friend Wag brought me during the day that preceded the mutiny, and now I hadn't the heart to reclaim the precious little bit of cambric from her lover's keeping.

He had not said a word to me about the miniature, so I resolved to keep it with all care, and deliver it safely with the letters whenever a fitting opportunity offered. To this end it seemed to me that I could do no better than to make a little deerskin bag, which I could easily secure somewhere about my clothing. I was very conscientious as to this miniature, you see, and would not have had anything happen to it on any account, for I had come to feel very tenderly toward poor Gordon's memory.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE STORM.

Harder and harder blew the gale, and the "Bantam," I feared, must be nearer the centre of the storm than we, if Morris had carried out his intention of running down the coast to the east and south. I had the "graveyard watch," that is from midnight till four A.M., so called by superstitious sailormen, because its hours are the most dreary of the whole night, and the most favorable, according to their creed, for mysterious occurrences, afloat and ashore. For whatever reason, I was startled out of what I am afraid was a doze, just inside the deck-house, by a long quavering screech coming off the wooded knoll under which we were anchored. I thought at first that it was our old friend the owl of the night before, the great brown owl, and was nearly dropping off again, for I was tired out after my vigil at Gordon's bedside, when once more it arose, and I was aware that my entire spinal column was becoming extraordinarily cold.

Going to where the after watch stood in the lee of the weather bulwarks, I found him quite as much scared as I. He said, moreover, that he had heard

a disturbance among the horses, which I thought not at all unnatural, if horses had any appreciation of blood-curdling sounds.

A third time the cry was repeated, now nearer to where the animals were tethered. The night was still black as Erebus, but it was not raining then, so I set off a Coston light, or its British equivalent, whatever its name may be, which showed us the poor horses in a state of extreme terror. The glare of the light probably finished the business for them, for Kentucky with a mighty effort wrenched himself clear, and galloped wildly away into the blackness, followed by all save the poor little sorrel mare. We found her when day dawned with her throat torn open and partly devoured, while the wet sand about showed the tracks of two panthers, whose cries had confirmed every sailorman's belief in the uncanny character of the "graveyard watch."

Morning dawned at last with no apparent abatement in the force of the gale. The wide sound, away to the obscured horizon, was one sheet of seething froth. Above the roar of the wind, we could at intervals hear the trampling of mighty seas on the outer beach, and sometimes the more violent gusts would carry the spindrift clear over the island and dash it down upon the schooner's decks like briny rain. Through the inlet to the west of us, we could see the white-capped surges chasing one another up channel, till they burst in foam against the inner bar.

Now and again, as the driving mist lifted, we could see the "Ranger's" blackened ribs with the spray flying over them. These, beside our own staunch craft, were the only signs of man's handiwork in sight, and, if anything, they only added to the wild desolation of the scene.

The sound, too, was filling up with a mighty tidal wave; the lead gave us a fathom more water than we had at sunset, and the strip of green grass, where we had tethered the horses, was now covered by a gusty stretch of shallow water. But it mattered little to us; our two anchors held bravely, and I overheard our veteran blue-jackets congratulating one another that they were "safe aboard ship, and not on shore, where chimneys were a-tumbling about folks' ears, and roofs a-blowing off, fit to scare the life out of you."

We had all of us slept more or less, in spite of the storm and its attendant excitements. I had ordered hot coffee kept on the galley fire all night, and the men had not been slow to keep up their spirits by a free use thereof. The cooks were routed out at early dawn to have a good breakfast ready for all hands.

The officers of the "Bold Briton" had been granted the liberty of the cabin, but held somewhat aloof from friendly intercourse with Nevers and me except to answer questions with bare civility. The "Ranger's" officers and men were prisoners of war,

and I kept them closely confined, letting them out, one or two at a time, for air and exercise, of which privilege, by the way, they did not seem at all disposed to take advantage.

After a careful inspection of all arms, discharging and reloading such as seemed in the least doubtful, I sent Nevers with two Jackies over to the Gulf beach to reconnoitre. They came back in two hours, reporting a wreck on the outer bar fast breaking up, and not a sign of life about her. She was a schooner, probably a blockade-runner that had missed the entrance when trying to make port in the height of the gale. All hands must have perished, for we never learned her name.

With this reminder of the dread possibilities of a hurricane, I could not but feel worried about the "Bantam." Of course, the chances were that she had found a safe anchorage, just as we had done in one of the many sounds along the Gulf coast; but then again, if she had sighted a blockade-runner just before sunset when the gale began, she had undoubtedly given chase, and might have run straight out into the vertex of the storm, — a thing which no sailorman wants to do, however much confidence he may have in the seaworthiness of his ship.

There was nothing for us to do, however, but stay where we were, and wait for the gale to blow itself out, which it began to show signs of doing about noon, and fell away rapidly, till in the early after-

noon an arch of blue sky uncovered in the west, the heavy pall of cloud lifted rapidly, shaking a few farewell drops of rain from its heavily fringed edges; and then the warm sun came out with such fervor that steam arose from everything afloat and ashore, temporarily hiding us from the enemy, and them from us.

I got in the stern anchor, hove short on the bow, shook out all sail at once to dry the canvas, and be ready to get under way in a hurry, should the enemy appear in such force as to be any way formidable.

When the storm was fairly over, one watch went ashore to make four graves for our dead, for we had lost three men, killed outright in the fight with the "Ranger," and Gordon made the fourth. His grave was made under the tall palmetto that he had selected. And on its smooth bark I carved his name and rank and the date of his death. For our own men, we prepared headboards in like manner. When everything was ready for sending the bodies on shore, I borrowed the captain's service-book, and, mustering all hands on deck, read the burial service in the presence of our twoscore English and Confederate prisoners, who uncovered their heads and listened respectfully, joining in the responses, where they could, and no doubt feeling better in their hearts for having heard the reverential words, even though they came from the unaccustomed lips of a son of the Puritans.

I had no objection to fighting in defence of my prize, but I had no intention of turning her into a United States cruiser. "Look for me to the eastward," so read Morris's instructions, written before anybody suspected what our adventures were to be. This certainly left me considerable discretion. He had not told me whether to look for him in Cheecola Sound or outside of St. Jude's Island, but considering the peril of remaining at our present anchorage during a calm night, with an active enemy so near at hand, I determined to take advantage of any favoring breeze, and get away to sea. But no favoring breeze, nor indeed any other breeze, came to our relief.

There was still a tremendous thunder of surf outside, and I dared not attempt the West Pass Channel, without a good stiff offshore wind. Even under the most favorable conditions, it would be a risky business, nosing our way out through an outlet that had a sharp elbow just at the worst possible place for an inexperienced navigator.

Nature, however, relieved me of all choice in the matter, for not a breath of air was stirring at sundown. From the crosstrees, I could overlook a circle of something like twenty-five miles radius, and the only signs of life, that I could discover, were two slender plumes of smoke that rose straight up from where I knew lay the town with its more or less formidable preparations for our destruction.

That I was conscious of a certain exultation, as I

sat away up there in the crosstrees, all alone in the soft Southern twilight, I cannot deny. Beneath me was the stout British marauder that was my lawful prize; over there on the bar was a privateer that, but for me, might be cruising after Yankee ships, and below decks were forty-two prisoners, enemies, one and all, of my country's cause.

Surely, a moderate degree of satisfaction was pardonable under the circumstances.

But these same prisoners gave me a good deal of uneasiness. Nearly every one of them would be only too ready to take a hand in the fight, if only they could break out and take us at a disadvantage. My original force of thirty-six blue-jackets had been reduced to twenty-five effectives by casualties. These were well able to keep the prisoners under, except for some extraordinary combination of circumstances, such as might readily occur in case of a night attack.

Glancing down at the deck, I saw Nevers, and obeying an impulse called him to come aloft, and he was soon sitting beside me. I knew very well that great commanders only call councils of war, when they have pretty well made up their minds what they are going to do; but I did not feel that way at all, just then. Looking back at it now, after all these years, I wonder that Nevers behaved so well as he did. If I had been in his place under the orders of a boy like myself, I do not believe that I should have been half so good about it as he was. He did not

seem to have a particle of jealousy in his disposition, and I think he was perfectly satisfied, so long as he had his two pieces of "Royal Artillery" in good order, and the boat-howitzer under his own personal control.

He had been working with this howitzer and the cutter in which it was mounted all the afternoon, and had got the boat rigged with a system of spars and tackles, so that she could be pointed in any direction.

"See anything, Jack?" he asked, when he reached my side.

"No, I just wanted to talk with you."

"Well, drive ahead; I'm listening."

"The fact is, this contract is so big that I'm getting a little afraid of it." And I indicated the vast solitary sweep of horizon, the forest apparently unbroken, and yet containing, as we well knew, hostile elements of no despicable character.

"It is pretty big, that's a fact," replied Nevers; "but you're 'monarch of all you survey,' you know."

"Yes, but the rest of the quotation won't fit."

"That's true; there are some to dispute your 'realm,' sure enough; but we're good for 'em."

"I wish we hadn't quite so many prisoners."

"Well, there's the island behind you. What's the matter with putting the Englishmen ashore?"

I had not thought of that, and the suggestion restored my spirits wonderfully. Not counting the cook, there were fourteen men of them, and in a very

"'WHEN THEY WERE ALL IN THE BOAT, I MOUNTED THE SCHOONER'S RAIL.'"

few minutes we had them mustered on deck. A call for British subjects from among the privateersmen brought forward ten more, of whose names and alleged birthplaces Nevers made a list, and we both passed judgment upon their English accent and general appearance. Giving them two gaff top-sails with which to improvise a shelter, we soon set them on the beach with such blankets as they had managed to save, or which could be proved as personal property.

When they were all in the boat, I mounted the schooner's rail and told them that they might go where they liked, but that it would be as much as any one's life was worth to start a fire within rifle range of the "Bold Briton." "You men all know, probably," I continued, "that St. Jude's Island is near thirty miles long, and that nobody lives here. You can't get anything to eat, so you had best be on hand for breakfast, and I still consider you my prisoners. Besides, there are panthers and bears in these woods, and alligators in the water, so be careful not to get lost."

These well-intended remarks were received in rather ungracious silence. The boat pulled ashore, landed her sullen passengers, and came back alongside. The shore party immediately went to work improving the few remaining minutes of twilight by spreading the sails on a dry bit of level sand, where I knew they could be fairly comfortable, and

at any rate would breathe purer air than they were accustomed to in the sailors' quarters of their respective craft.

It was now so dark that we could not be seen from the mainland, so we warped round to our stern anchor again so that the battery commanded the approach by water. According to all rules of prudent seamanship, it should be the height of folly to keep all sails standing at night and the vessel moored bow and stern; but this was just what I ventured to do in defiance of what I was certain some of the old deep-water sailormen thought about it. I could see some of them shaking their heads gravely, as they looked aloft at the spreading canvas. It seemed to me that the danger of attack was so imminent, that it was worth while to run considerable risk, rather than lose valuable time in making sail at a critical moment. So the watch was set, silence enjoined fore and aft, and all hands went early to sleep, save only Nevers and I, by turn, and a lookout at the forecastle and by the taffrail.

Sounds carried well that night. We could still hear the roar of breakers on the bar, though the sea had gone down so that if only we could have a breath of air, there would be no difficulty in getting outside. It was dark starlight. Here and there along the shore one could make out the broader patches of beach sand, showing white under the stars, and now and again the dying effort of some unusually heavy

roller working in from outside would send a ripple of phosphorescence twinkling along the water's edge.

Owls, lumpkins, and the other musicians of the semi-tropical night tuned up, and the British contingent on shore kept up a pretty steady undertone of gossip.

It seemed as though not two successive minutes passed that one or another of them did not strike a match for one purpose or another; but I did not want to interfere in a little matter like that, and so let them light as many matches as they chose.

It was my watch at eight o'clock, and Nevers, having seen his gun squads properly disposed within reach of their pieces, had turned in. The "Bold Briton" lay with her head toward the bivouac on shore, and both boats were under our stern davits—the cutter, with two men to work her howitzer, and the long-boat, with one man for a boat guard.

About seven bells the forward lookout whistled the "Bantam" call, and I joined him on the forecastle, when he pointed out a glare, as of fire pretty well hidden behind some bushes, but very likely in a position where it could be plainly seen on the mainland. After watching it through my glasses for a while and seeing that it gained in strength and brightness, I called one of the watch and went with him half-way up the fore rigging, whence we had a better view of the flame, and could see two dark figures in silhouette against the sea, standing and

apparently looking off intently toward the mainland.

"Look, Mr. Benson, there's a light on shore," said my companion, who was a fathom or so higher up in the rigging. And so there was, as nearly as I could tell, on the old Cheecola harbor light-tower.

I didn't want to hurt any "Bold Briton," unnecessarily; but this thing must be stopped, so Jacky sent a bullet from his carbine, which knocked a cloud of sparks out of the burning palmetto stalks and caused the two men to jump promptly behind convenient trees. We had Sharp's carbines (breech-loaders) in those days, and a second shot speedily followed the first.

My shouted order, "Put out that fire," was obeyed with commendable alacrity, hatfuls of sand being apparently thrown upon the flames. I suppose the fellows thought we might take to indiscriminate shooting among the bushes, in which case somebody might be hurt.

Of course every one turned out instanter at the sound of the shots, but word was passed that it was nothing but a fire alarm, and after a moderate exercise of his right to grumble, Jacky made himself comfortable again. Nevers took the deck at midnight, and lying down just under the taffrail, where the after watch could call me without leaving his post, I was asleep in less than a minute.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BRITISH PLOT.

When Nevers, disregarding my exalted rank, shook me roughly about six bells, everybody was at stations, and an indescribable atmosphere of expectancy seemed to pervade the entire ship's company. I was so sleepy that I could not for the life of me understand what Nevers was saying. He actually had to shake me again before I comprehended that two steamboats were coming out across the sound.

Our lookout had heard them some time before, but Nevers had let me sleep as long as he dared. The night was so absolutely still that the beat of their paddles could be heard soon after they left the harbor, ten or twelve miles away. That they were still a long way off was the opinion of the best judges on board; but it is impossible to judge distances accurately under such conditions, so we could only wait, letting the watch make itself as comfortable as possible without going below.

Nevers and I had agreed to flash our bull's-eye lanterns from time to time at irregular intervals upon the British bivouac, just to make them think

we were watching them, and the good angel that takes care of the life of poor Jack had prompted Nevers to do this again, when things became quiet after the steamer alarm. A common bull's-eye lantern does not compare very favorably with a search-light as used on board our modern men-of-war, and we could really see nothing from where we stood near the main rigging. However, the good angel aforesaid did not desert us, for Nevers swung his lantern around, letting the lens illuminate the near-by water in a circle, until it was reflected from the white boats that were moored under our stern. I heard him stifle an exclamation as he hurried aft, motioning me to follow.

We reached the taffrail almost together, and the light flashed down upon the long-boat, swung partly away from her moorings. Two or three dark figures were visible on board of her, apparently getting out oars; and in the water, advancing with lusty strokes, were the heads of swimmers, the whites of their eyes glaring as the lantern rays brought them out with ghastly vividness.

"Lay aft all the watch," shouted Nevers, who from his position had first taken in the situation, and, with a common impulse, both of us drew our revolvers and opened on the men already in the boat.

The two men in the cutter, aroused by the shots, took a hand in the fusillade; but the fasts had been

cut or cast off, and the boat, partly drifting and partly urged by invisible swimmers on the far side of her, was slowly moving away.

It was not necessary for me to order Nevers to man the cutter, for as soon as he had emptied his revolver, he swung himself down by the falls, and was followed by a dozen men, who tumbled aboard any way they could.

Clearing away a boat in such helter-skelter fashion as this cannot be done in such good shape or so quickly as when the crew is regularly called over the side. I suppose it must have been five minutes before they had their oars out, and started in pursuit. Meanwhile, the long-boat had made fair progress with five men at the oars. They had struck out into the sound, but Nevers overhauled them rapidly, and in a few minutes I heard his voice out of the darkness.

"Stand by to fire! Boat ahoy! avast pulling there, or I'll fire." There was a confused crashing of oars, and then the strong chug of oars was resumed, and Nevers came back alongside.

"All right, Nevers?" I asked.

"All except one man killed and two wounded, and Stewart, the long-boat guard, is in a rather bad way, but I think he'll come to."

Lifting the wounded men over the rail as carefully as we could, the cutter's crew towed the long-boat over to the British bivouac, and left the survivors

with their dead to repent at leisure of having stirred up the Yankee blue-jackets.

In justice to the two men who were in the cutter, it should be said that in view of the scarcity of men and the arduous duty to which they were liable, it was understood that only one of the three who were in the boats need keep awake. Stewart, the long-boat guard, had been on duty at the time of this attack, and had been deftly "roped" from behind, and choked with a round turn about his neck. Privately, I think that he must have been dozing at the time, but anyhow he was so energetically choked, that it was several days before he was fit for duty again.

Of course this little fracas had advertised our whereabouts to the enemy, who had no doubt seen the flashes of our guns, and must have heard the reports. But the slow beat of paddles went on, apparently not much nearer than before, and in a few minutes we were all to rights again with the boats moored as before, our small arms reloaded and ready for whatever the night might still have in store for us.

The hours of darkness were now nearly done; signs of approaching dawn began to suggest themselves over the dark hammock growth on the island. Telling Nevers that I would stand the rest of his watch, I waited rather impatiently for daylight, while he turned in for another nap.

The light was "powerful slow" in coming, and when at last it strengthened enough to put out the stars there was a very beautiful, but very objectionable, veil of roseate mist spread all across the bay. Above it, however, some three miles distant, stood revealed two slender black smokestacks and two masts all bunched together waiting for the haze to lift. There was a man aloft in the fore crosstrees of the hostile schooner, — a pilot, doubtless, who could see me as well as I could see him. Our cooks were already at work getting breakfast for all hands, and still the fog lay in a dense, shallow bank.

The British contingent ashore had started fires as soon as they dared assume that we would not make a target of them, and now they began to be importunate for breakfast. I sent ashore a rather slender allowance, having no notion of feeding them up to a dangerous state of pugnacity.

About nine o'clock the mist began to drift away to the eastward, lifting presently and disclosing two river steamers, black with men along their guards, while a schooner in tow carried a lot more. Nevers and I estimated, that all told, there must be five hundred men on the three vessels, and you may well believe that I went up to the crosstrees feeling that a crisis of some sort was at hand. Of course the lifting fog disclosed the Confederate squadron to our British friends, who forthwith departed down the beach with cheers and a fair percentage

of Rebel yells, and endeavored to open communication.

We saw them go rather regretfully, for it would have been quite a feather in our caps to bring in such a fine array of prisoners and turn them over to the flagship. But in view of intending hostilities, it was far better to have them safe ashore than under our own hatches and disposed to make all the trouble they could.

It was very unlikely, having recent experience of the range of Her Majesty's guns, that the Confederates would attempt to carry us by boarding, at least by daylight, for Nevers must be in very bad form indeed if he could not sink both or all three of the Rebel squadron long before they could come alongside.

The little flotilla got under way as soon as the fog lifted enough to show them their course, running past us and on toward the inlet, where the water was deeper in shore. They kept well over toward the far side of the channel, but offered such a tempting mark that Nevers asked leave to try conical shot at them. As the guns had been loaded for two days, and during very damp weather at that, I told him to go ahead, so he drew the double charges of canister provided for a night attack, and substituted two wicked-looking rifled shot, giving both pieces their highest elevation, and placing his best gunner in charge of one of them, while he sighted the other

himself. It was necessary to fire both pieces at once, because in the still air the smoke of the first discharge would hide everything in the immediate vicinity for several minutes.

The two reports came within a second of each other, and with my glasses levelled at the Rebel vessels, I watched for the shot. In a moment two minute specks rose into the field of vision, almost side by side; higher they mounted, and higher, till it seemed as if they were going to soar clean over the mark, and fall somewhere in the seceded States. But no — the upward movement became slower, stopped, and then, so swiftly that I could scarcely follow them with my eye, the shot dropped into the water, a hundred yards beyond the mark.

"How was that?" asked Nevers from beneath the smoke, as his crews sprang to sponge out and reload.

"About three turns too high," I replied.

"Give 'em four down," I heard Nevers say, which was very disrespectful and inconsiderate of him; but as he was the better artillerist, I swallowed the unintended affront.

It seemed an age before the smoke settled and drifted away from the deck, but at last the gunners could see their mark again, and again the twin steel messengers rose into the sky. This time, they struck quite near, and from the commotion among the soldiers on board, it was evident that the Johnnies

did not relish being made a target of, when they could not fire back, — and small blame to them, for the tearing of a rifle shot close overhead, through the still air of a summer morning, is not in the least calculated to soothe the nerves.

We had only one more chance at them, for they put on all steam and drew rapidly out of range; but Nevers's last shot hulled the schooner, which, being in tow, was nearer than her escort, doing no special harm, but serving further to demoralize the soldiers, who possibly had seen little active service, and were not hardened to indifference under fire.

At all events, they were safe for the present, and leaving the schooner anchored in deep water, the two flat-bottomed river steamers ran their noses up on the beach, and I could see the men jumping down from the guards into the shallows and wading ashore. Details were speedily at work landing two field guns and their equipment, and thus lightened, it was easy for one of the boats to back off, run alongside the schooner, and bring ashore her company of soldiers.

Nevers had joined me in the crosstrees, and together we watched the disembarkation, which was clearly superintended by officers who knew what they were about.

The men formed up in good shape on the beach, long drag ropes were bent on to the limbers of the guns, and with a hundred men or so to each piece, the

detachment tramped off into the woods, leaving the boats and the schooner presumably with only their ordinary crews on board. The steamboats backed off, tied up alongside the schooner, and were apparently content to bide their time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MANILA BREEZE.

Ten o'clock, and still a flat calm! The glassy sound ruffled only by jumping shoals of mullet and pompano, where sharks and tarpon were hunting their breakfasts. What would be the next move? Why, of course, a shell from the nearest available bluff, and a fusillade of rifle bullets from the near-by edge of the timber.

But it was not on my programme to wait for any such proceeding. Having seen the land force well ashore, and given them time to get fairly beyond the possibility of speedy recall, it was time for us to act. If the wind would not blow a breeze, we must make one for ourselves.

Ordering Mossman to clear away a light kedge anchor and bend on a new three-inch manila rope, I sent Nevers on deck to take care of his battery, I remaining aloft, where I could best watch the enemy.

With the kedge on board and four men at the oars, the dingy pulled out into the bay. The new manila line uncoiling itself, paying out over the stern and floating like a long kinky yellow snake on the surface of the water.

Both anchors were at the catheads by the time the dingy dropped the kedge overboard some two hundred yards offshore, and all hands tailed on to the inboard end of the kedge rope, walking away aft and swinging the "Bold Briton" round with her nose toward the ship channel.

As soon as she straightened out on her course, it was easy hauling. In a few minutes we were up with the kedge, tripped it as we went over, dropped it into the dingy again, which was holding on to a buoy-rope, and away she went for another two hundred yards reach.

Of course there were sailormen aboard the Rebel vessels who knew what we were up to as soon as they heard the clank of our windlass. Shots were fired and whistles blown, which doubtless gave warning that we were leaving our anchorage. But what cared we for that? They could not possibly bring their guns back to the beach before we were pretty well offshore, and if only they would show themselves within range, I knew that Nevers could make it very hot for them.

The two steamboats forthwith abandoned the schooner to her fate, leaving no one on board, so far as we could see. She was a small coaster, pressed into service merely as a transport, and it was not worth while to risk anything on her account. The steamboat captains had gauged the range of our guns with praiseworthy nicety during the round of

ball practice in the early morning, and as we drew out from shore, and began to feel the ebb-tide setting us toward the West Pass, they both made off into New Inlet, where they could lie safely in shoal water, out of reach of our shot.

We took the kedge on board nearly in mid channel, and began drifting slowly to the westward. Shortly afterward skirmishers appeared on the beach where they had made their landing. Nevers, always ready for gun practice, was eager to stir them up a little, and as I thought it would have a good moral effect on all concerned, he went to work shelling the woods in leisurely fashion as we drifted down channel.

Old Mossman soon found that he could keep the schooner pointed on her course by hauling the main-boom over to one side or the other, the gentle drift of the tide enabling the big sail to act as a sort of aërial rudder. After a few shots, not a soul was to be seen on the beach, for since no reply was possible, all hands rightly took to cover and waited for us to drift out of range, which, in the natural course of things, we did, setting fire to the transport schooner as we passed, for I did not like to spare enough men to make a prize of her, and if afloat, she might easily cause trouble for us.

So I reluctantly set her ablaze, and I hope all the good Yankee ships that Semmes of the "Alabama" burned rested as heavily upon his conscience as this poor little coasting schooner did upon mine.

We drifted lazily along for three hours or so; the steamboats came out of the inlet, some of the soldiers re-embarked, and I had no doubt that if fortune favored them they would try to board us under cover of darkness. I hoped, therefore, to make my way out through the pass before the tide turned, and so ordered out the cutter and dingy with a towline to quicken our pace a little. The Gloucester man, who was my reliance for such duty, was sent aloft to give us the course. He had spent nearly half his life on the Grand Banks, and could make a very close guess at the depth of water merely by looking at it.

As soon as the Rebel steamers saw us send the boats ahead, they were after us under a full head of steam, their engines panting in the still air, and their gun crews at quarters.

The officer in command saw his opportunity, and determined to make the most of it. While we were in tow of our boats, the "Royal Artillery" could not be brought to bear directly astern, therefore it was perfectly safe for any hostile craft to creep up in our wake and pepper us at will, unless we could contrive some way of standing them off. Each of the boats carried, as nearly as we could make out, a bronze six-pounder mounted on a field carriage, and quite capable of hammering us well at fifteen hundred yards distance, and perhaps with good luck of sinking us altogether.

Our guns were superior in weight and range, and probably our gunners were the better marksmen, but skill availed nothing while the enemy kept directly astern. Before they began firing, I bethought me of the English skipper and his mate in the after cabin, and going below gave them warning of what was about to happen, and offered them their choice of staying where they were or taking their chances with the captured privateersmen forward. Having in mind the ammunition stored under the cabin floor, they naturally preferred the company of the privateersmen and accepted my invitation.

Nevers wanted to train his guns aft at a high elevation and fire over the after deck-house with low charges, but I put a veto upon this, dreading lest some damage should result to sails or rigging or perhaps even to the cabin itself and the dangerous stores that were packed away beneath it.

We were making fairly good progress down channel now, but our friends astern soon began firing solid shot at us, with such accuracy that it was not at all agreeable. They kept at a very respectful distance, to be sure, knowing that we had only to drop an anchor to bring our guns to bear, but before they fairly got the range I remembered how well the "Otter's" ammunition chest served us as a torpedo-boat down on Redman's River, and determined to repeat the experiment on a larger scale.

We had made free to open and empty some cases

of Enfield rifles: long packing boxes made of pine carefully put together with screws, and practically water tight. Nevers caught the idea instantly when I mentioned it, for the story of the fight off Myrona was not unknown in the "Bantam's" mess-room. He went below with some of his men, and in a very few minutes had two of the empty cases artistically ballasted with loaded shells, and slow matches adjusted with a view to explosion in due time. Running these up on deck with a light whip rope to the foresail gaff, Nevers lighted the fuses and lowered the boxes over the side, one to port and the other to starboard. They dropped astern with encouraging rapidity, and showed up so big on the glassy surface of the water, that they really looked quite formidable.

To our amusement three or four cormorants, always on the watch for roosting places, saw fit to alight on the boxes, and having settled which were the best places by fighting for them, they sat up straight with their hooked beaks looking as though they intended to retain permanent possession. It is singular what small account wild creatures make of artillery firing. I have seen a pair of hawks circling round a thirteen-inch shell in the upper arc of its flight, seeming to wonder what this new monster could be invading their peculiar realm of upper air with its sputtering fuse; I have heard mocking-birds singing in the treetops, while a brisk infantry en-

gagement was in progress below, and upon the whole the feathered tribe seem to hold our little human quarrels in profound contempt.

The Rebels, meanwhile, kept pounding away at us, no doubt enjoying the process quite as much as we had enjoyed our previous amusement with them; the sound of an artillery missile coming toward you differs very much from the same sound when the projectile is going in the opposite direction, and the difference is intensified when the firing is all on one side. Our assailants, too, were improving their aim with practice. They struck us several times with plunging shot, which might very likely have gone clean through the bottom boards of the schooner, but for a stratum of railway iron that the Liverpool stevedores had stowed on the main-deck to make her roll easy.

The two steamers were now coming up with our torpedo-boxes, and warned, perhaps, by the little whiffs of smoke, they sheered off one to the south and the other to the north side of the channel. Nevers had trained both of his guns as far aft as they could point, and when the steamboats had pretty well opened out on both sides of us, I signalled the boats' crews ahead to stop pulling, ordered the wheel hard aport, giving the "Bold Briton" a rank sheer to starboard. She swung slowly around, and the steamer on that side, promptly taking the alarm, reversed her engines with commendable

promptness, firing her gun as she did so. The shot came straight through our main rigging, just above Nevers's head, cutting one or two preventer stays, the lower parts of which fell down in a raffle on the breech of the gun that he was sighting. The crew cleared them away in a few seconds, and Nevers calmly readjusted his sight, gave the elevating screw an infinitesimal turn, and then stepped back to fire, his face set, every muscle tense, and I make no manner of doubt, in a kind of professional trance. Making a successful shot was to him what making a critical move is to some chess-players.

"Stand still and hold your breath all hands," cried he, and I think he would have said the same if Farragut himself, instead of a fellow-middy, had stood in my place.

The sea was absolutely calm, and the schooner swung round almost as accurately as if she had been mounted on a traverse. Nevers's trained eye had marked the proper elevation on the horizon line, and the sight covered the target almost with mathematical accuracy.

Truly it was a most lovely shot. It went in straight under the overhang of the steamer's saloon-deck, and apparently burst right in the midst of her boiler, for she was instantly enveloped in a cloud of steam, and her smokestack shot a black column of soot away up into the serene blue sky.

Her consort went promptly to her aid, ignoring

our two floating torpedoes altogether, and steering contemptuously between them. Luckily for her, they both decided to wait until she was well outside the danger belt, when they blew up one after the other, with much smoke and splashing and much demoralization among the cormorants, who till the last persisted in making them a temporary roosting place, and I fear that some of them met an untimely end in the final catastrophe.

Nevers's shot settled the question of pursuit for the time being. The uninjured steamer took her disabled sister in tow, and removed her speedily beyond reach of the "Royal Artillery," while we shortly found ourselves headed off by the tide right in the narrowest part of the pass. There was nothing for it but to anchor and make ready for another night.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT SEA AGAIN.

Tidal currents in the Gulf of Mexico do not amount to much when compared with our Northern tides; but a tolerably strong current for those latitudes was presently setting into the sound so fast that we could not think of towing against it, nor was it possible to anchor the schooner bow and stern across channel so as to command the approaches by water. We had to let her ride with her nose to the current, and trust to our own activity and seamanship to bring the guns to bear in case of need.

It did not matter much, however, for a night attack by boarders was rather unlikely, now that the enemy had but one serviceable steamer left to lay alongside. Moreover, we were out in the open bay, and the sea was calm, so that with a good lookout, we ought to discover any approaching craft at moderately long shooting distance.

All of us had been so much broken of our rest and so continually on arduous duty for the last three days, that I determined to let everybody sleep as much and as long as possible, and as the night was calm and mild all turned in on deck, and slept

the sleep of the sailorman, all, that is, except the young middy in command, who, in the pride of his youth, resolved to keep solitary watch all by himself, and hoped for a peaceful morrow in which to recuperate.

Back and forth the length of the deck I walked, all through that silent night, I suppose, hundreds of times. For a while I tried to keep count, but very soon forgot the hundreds, — now mounting to the forecastle for a look to seaward, and now standing silent at the taffrail, listening and looking over the silent inland waters. Occasionally there came to my ears sounds of hammering and of voices from the distant Rebel bivouac, but nothing happened to interrupt Nature's own programme. The waning moon rose during the small hours, dawn at last appeared, and at four o'clock I called Mossman, as had been agreed upon the night before, and leaving him in charge of the deck, I went below, unbuckled my waist belt with infinite relief, dropped down on a bed, and for several hours knew no more.

When I awoke, the "Bold Briton" was dipping gently to a regular ocean swell. I could hear the swash of water along the side, and the list of the cabin floor told me that we were under canvas and going at a good rate of speed.

I lost no time in getting on deck, where everything was quite ship-shape and Bristol fashion. For the first time since the capture, Mossman and Blake

had found an opportunity to gratify their ship-keeping instincts. They had turned to all hands after early coffee, washed down decks, coiled away rigging, and so far effaced the signs of recent conflict that, barring the lack of her upper spars, the "Bold Briton" looked quite the correct thing.

This early start was all in accordance with an agreement between Nevers and myself the night before, when I told him that I considered it my duty to run down the coast to the eastward and look for the "Bantam," as Morris had told me to do, although more time had elapsed than had been foreseen when the instructions were given.

The breeze had come in from the Gulf with early daylight, and no difficulty had been experienced in working out to sea. Here was I, then, fairly on blue water, in command of a fine, staunch, British-built schooner, with no specific orders from my superiors, and the whole Gulf of Mexico on my weather bow. What wonder that I secretly exulted at the thought, and at the sight of the lovely stretch of summer ocean, limitless to the southward, and showing a line of creamy foam along the white beach to the north.

We had now been under way several hours, and were off the end of St. Jude's Island, where I hoped to find the "Bantam," and where, failing that, I intended to anchor for the night. So we stood on across the mouth of the pass and into St. Andy's Bay, where we could lie in perfect security from the

weather, and with reasonable certainty that there was no hostile force worth considering nearer than the rather demoralized detachment which had tested the quality of our fare the day before.

Cheecola and St. Jude's sounds together form a superb body of water, stretching for nearly forty miles along the coast. It is formed by a succession of islands, Chaney being the easternmost. This name is probably a corruption of Isle aux Chiens, that is to say, "Dog Island." At any rate, there is a capital anchorage behind it. We slipped in there and let go our "mud-hook," just before the Gulf breeze went to sleep for the night, as it has a habit of doing with much regularity in these latitudes during the summer months.

I kept the main-sail standing after the manner of Yankee coastwise skippers, although according to the navy regulations I ought to have doused it before sundown. I reasoned, however, that having it set was just so much time gained in case the necessity arose of getting under way in a hurry.

After supper Nevers and I sat together aft in the calm twilight, talking over our experiences of the past few days, and luxuriating in the sense of security engendered by our apparently peaceful surroundings.

What a lovely coast that is, to be sure, with its broad sounds, sheltered beaches, and beautiful streams! Why in the world people who love out-of-door life, and can afford to do it, do not build house-

boats, or, if they prefer, cottages, and pass their winters in paradise, is more than I can comprehend. Hundreds of miles of sandy beach and coral reef just begging people to come and occupy them rent free. As it was in the days of which I write, so it is now to all intents and purposes, for I was there a few years ago, and know that its charms are still the same.

Our evening meditations on deck were interrupted by seeing some of the crew looking attentively toward the mainland, and as Nevers was facing in that direction, he saw first something that caused us to fear lest our security was not quite so profound as we had imagined. Above the distant horizon of forest there arose a thin wavering line of smoke, sharply defined against the serene evening sky. Straight up it went, with a little balloon-like mushroom top to it, as though a powerful fire had been started with some sort of an explosion. Slowly it floated upward, looking like the smoke that rises from a factory chimney. Our glasses resolved the thin column into dark rolls of smoke, lazily turning over and over as they rose, and all pushing upward, swaying from side to side, to a great height.

At last the mushroom-shaped cap reached a stratum of air that had a little northerly drift in it, and away it gently soared over the mainland. What could it be? A signal fire, or a smoke from some salt-works? Our prisoners either could not or would not tell us

anything about it, so we had plenty of room for speculation, and evolved no end of theories from an iron-clad ram coming down the river to sink us to an innocent bonfire, possibly made by a hunting party of Mickosukie Indians.

Nevers had found among the equipment that was stowed away in the cabin a transit instrument, probably intended for some engineering officer in the Confederate service. Bringing it up on deck, he took the compass bearings of the column of smoke so that we could know where to look for it after nightfall. The smoke was evidently at a considerable distance from our anchorage, and it gave me no special anxiety, although at intervals after dark a faint glow lighted up the lower part of the column. The night passed without disturbance, and when I went on deck before sunrise, there was no air stirring, and still the mysterious plume of smoke rose as it had risen the evening before. But after an hour or two it faded and finally disappeared altogether.

Coastwise navigation becomes dangerous and difficult to the eastward of Chaney Island, for there are no safe harbors of refuge, and the oyster-reefs and coral-banks of Appalachee and Deadman's bays make out sometimes miles from shore. While there are channels between these reefs, they are known only to local pilots, and were unmarked in those days or, at least, marked only by utterly unreliable cormorants, whose sympathies were evidently with the Con-

federacy, for they sat upon every available stake and oyster-bunch, and looked as much as they could like channel marks for the delusion of unwary Yankees. After having nearly got into trouble two or three times when on boat expeditions, owing to their misrepresentations, I had become shy of them, and gave them a wide berth.

On this particular morning, two irregular rows of these gentle birds sat along the edge of the tide rift and offered every inducement for us to run up a presumed channel between them, but we did not accept. For these, and other reasons, I did not like to go farther to the eastward, for there was no readily available harbor nearer than Cedar Key, nearly a hundred miles distant, and probably a rather unsafe neighborhood for a small Yankee crew in any case. So I determined to stay where I was for the present and await news of the "Bantam," which it seemed certain must come in some shape sooner or later.

By this time our prisoners had laid aside some of their original Confederate stand-offishness, and some of them had become more or less chummy with our blue-jackets. You can't keep sailormen from forming friendships with one another, even if they are on opposite sides in some such little matter as a civil war. Politicians and women are different. One or two of these men, it was intimated, would even enlist in Uncle Sam's navy when they found the chance to do so, under circumstances that made it improbable

that they would again be taken by their own people. Accordingly, when word was brought to me that one of the prisoners had volunteered to catch some fresh fish for us, if we could find him a cast-net, I willingly assented. Some of the men rummaged among the fishing-tackle and found one of the desired nets. These are unfamiliar to most Northern fishermen, but are used throughout the waters of the Gulf and pretty well up toward the Carolinas on the Atlantic coast, — possibly by this time they may have made their way still farther north.

The net is circular in shape, some ten or twelve feet in diameter, bordered with a bit of line, and strung all around its circumference with leaden sinkers. The meshes grow gradually larger from circumference to centre, where they are attached to a stout hand-line several yards long, according as it is intended to use the net in deep or in shallow water. To use one of these nets adroitly requires a deal of practice. The fisherman, standing in the bow of the boat, gathers the net in his right hand ready for casting, and holds the edge between his teeth. When he reaches a favorable ground, or sees a school of fish beneath him, he makes a sudden and powerful sweep of the arm, and the net is spread out beautifully, almost like the top of a great round table, and descends with a splash of its leaden outline into the water. The splash, covering so large an area, seems to confuse or terrify the fish, and usually a

number of them are enclosed within the descending circle of sinkers. Whether they are small or large they are gathered in, the lower edge of the net hauled up, and the captives are dropped into the boat alive and kicking and without having received the slightest injury.

After the Confederate fisherman had showed us once or twice how he could cast the net and have it lie like a great circular tablecloth spread on deck, or over a similar surface when cast from the rail, I ordered out the dingy with two blue-jackets to row and one to steer, and sent them off to get some fresh fish for dinner.

Cautioning the men to pull as silently as possible, the privateersman stood up at the bow, looking down into the clear water. Presently he made a cast, and in a few minutes had quite a number of mullet and pompano flapping their silvery sides in the bottom of the boat. These pompano are the most delicious fish I ever tasted, that is, when they are fresh from their native waters in the Gulf.

CHAPTER XX.

A MONSTER OF THE DEEP.

As there was nothing else to do, all hands watched proceedings with interest. The men, pulling about in the vicinity of the schooner under the privateersman's direction, had tolerably good luck, and were about to return on board, when, just as the fisherman was pulling up his net after a cast, the hand-line was suddenly jerked out of his grasp. The line hissed through the water and, reaching its full length (it was made fast to one of the forward thwarts), jumped the boat violently ahead. The fisherman was hurled violently backwards, falling over the shoulders of the bow oarsman, and the little boat started off at a terrific rate of speed toward the channel which I have referred to as being staked out by cormorants.

They were out of earshot before anybody could hail to ask what was the matter; but we saw the fisherman pick himself up, and the Jackies get their oars and begin holding water so as to make it more difficult for them to be run away with. One of the privateersman's officers was on deck at the time of this occurrence, and as he was somewhat familiar

with natural life along the coast, he hazarded the opinion that a devil-fish had got hold of the cast net, and was making off with the entire outfit.

Now the devil-fish of the Gulf of Mexico and our South Atlantic seaboard is not at all the same creature as the one described by Victor Hugo in "The Toilers of the Sea," although I believe the giant squid is called a devil-fish too. This particular creature is something like a gigantic ray or "stingaree," measuring sometimes as much as twenty feet from tip to tip of his broad wings, and is equipped with a pair of claspers, as they are called, short, muscular arms in the forepart of him, for which probably he has some definite use in the ordinary vocations of life. When he becomes excited, he is very apt to fasten with a death-like grip upon anything that comes within reach of these claspers, and he has been known to clasp the iron cable of a ship at anchor and struggle with it in his terror until tired out. But occasionally, as in the case of our dingy, he gets hold of something that he can run away with, and then he is literally in his element. Boats have often been towed out to sea for long distances in some such way as this. Indeed, the devil-fish is ordinarily found on the offshore edge of soundings, but in this instance one of them seems to have strayed into the comparatively shallow waters of the bay. Perhaps this very fact had rather shaken his nerves, so that they gave way altogether when the splash of the

cast-net occurred above his head, and the downward sweep of the lead-line offered a tempting object to the grasp of his arms. At any rate, away he went toward the river mouth at a rate of ten or a dozen knots an hour.

I could not think of letting three of my best men be carried off to the enemy's country in any such way as this, so knowing that the fish's strength must give out sooner or later, I sent the cutter in pursuit with orders not to come back until they had overtaken them, or until it was evidently unsafe to pursue any farther.

By the time the cutter got off, the dingy was a mere speck close against the beach, and eventually she disappeared behind a point of land whither the cutter soon followed her, and we were left swinging idly to our anchor with nothing to do but wait for their return and watch the mysterious smoke tracing its thin line upon the sky.

Whether the Southern Confederacy or the seceded State of Florida ever adopted any pilot laws during their brief existence, I do not know. At all events, no pilot dues were ever exacted for showing our boats the best way up this unknown stream. The man who had gone as coxswain of the dingy when she was run away with by the devil-fish, as just described, was an old Nantucket whaler, Dan by name, who had cruised all over the North Pacific. His professional instincts were aroused, as soon as he

found his boat fast to something that could run away with it, in a style which recalled the days when he was a boat steerer in the "Galapagos country."

The privateersman was for casting off the line and letting the net and everything else go; but the hitch had jammed around the thwart, under the sudden strain, so that he could not readily loose it, and before he could borrow a knife from one of the crew, the old whaleman forbade him. Dan called one of the oarsmen to take the tiller, and himself changed places with the privateersman in the bow, where, armed with a boat-hook having a sheath knife lashed to its "business end," he awaited an opportunity to despatch this unfamiliar monster scientifically, that is, as he would have done in the case of a sperm whale. Dan's first sight of the devil-fish was when it soared like a bird with broad blue wings over a white patch of sandy bottom, and it gave him an idea of the immense size of the creature. He always declared that the speed of an express train was as nothing compared to the rate at which that devil-fish flew up the shallowing channel. Ordinarily, when a boat is towed by a whale, the affair comes off far out at sea where there is nothing to mark progress by; but here were frequent shallows and sand-bars and oyster-reefs, and all the dingy's crew agreed that it was the most wildly exciting cruise they ever experienced.

The devil-fish, although he is usually an inhabitant of the deep sea, appeared to be perfectly familiar with the channel, and though he was probably wild with terror, some blind instinct guided him away from shallow water. Only once was he at fault, and finding himself on the wrong side of a narrow sand-bar, which had only two feet or so of water upon it, he did not hesitate a moment; but holding the net firmly in his grasp, put on a tremendous spurt, threw himself clean out of water, smote air and water and sand one mighty blow with his wings, and over he went into the deep water beyond, taking the dingy after him with a jerk that sent the entire crew off their seats.

Then he sulked for a while on the bottom, giving the cutter time to come alongside and take the line, bending it on to her own spare line so as to give him more scope; and it was lucky she did so, for hardly was the change effected, when he was off again up stream, and the cutter's crew had all they wanted to ease out the line and get headway on the boat before they had to make fast and let the pilot go ahead at his own sweet will. Towing both boats, however, was harder work than towing the dingy alone, and the great fish presently gave it up, beaching himself high and dry with his nose almost in the bushes, the cutter riding in right on top of him before headway could be checked.

Dan had the satisfaction of trying to lance the

game with his sheath knife, but the devil-fish did not seem to mind it a bit, and they had to pry his claspers open with two oars in order to release the net before leaving him to die and furnish food for buzzards.

Finding themselves so unexpectedly on the mainland and out of sight of their ship, it occurred to our Jackies to do a little reconnoitring on their own account, so they pulled for a mile or two up the beautiful wooded river, with its swift, clear current, seeing numerous alligators, egrets, and flamingoes, and at last found themselves at the foot of a rapid, where grew a mighty cypress tree, about whose straight and massive trunk a huge vine had coiled itself up to where the umbrella-like top spread out against the sky. An active young blue-jacket volunteered to climb this, taking advantage of the vine to help him, and get an observation of the surrounding country. He did so, going up some eighty feet, and was rewarded by a nearer view of the mysterious smoke which we had seen from the schooner the day before; but although he could see it more plainly, being nearer, he could make nothing of it, and his story only served to pique our curiosity.

I was beginning to feel a little anxious about the boats, when they came in sight again; but the choice assortment of fresh fish for dinner, and the story of the exciting run with a devil-fish for pilot, varied somewhat the monotony of the day.

CHAPTER XXI.

"GO EAST, JACK."

All day long had the Gulf breeze kept the "Bold Briton" pointing her nose seaward, as though impatient to leave her anchorage. All day long had I debated whether I should get under way, and in which direction I should steer if I did so. We had kept a lookout aloft, and occasionally I relieved him by going up and sitting for an hour at a time in the crosstrees, watching for some sign of friend or foe that might indicate what it was best for me to do. But no sign of human life was to be seen all day except the column of smoke, which appeared and disappeared with no apparent regularity, and save for the fact that it was smoke, and the allowable inference that where there was smoke there must be fire and human agency to create it, even this could hardly be regarded as indicating human neighbors.

The breeze died down as usual in the afternoon, and a land breeze came off an hour or two after sunset. This decided me not to wait any longer, but, as the wind was so very favorable, to get under way and to run for the blockading squadron off Mobile,

where, at least, I should find somebody to take the responsibility of an independent command off from my young and inexperienced shoulders. Surely, by this time, if nothing had happened to the "Bantam," she would have appeared off one or the other of the passes, and in either case would have looked us up. Upon the whole, I thought I had carried out my instructions fairly well, having looked for Morris fifty or sixty miles to the eastward of where he had left us.

It is plain sailing, with a fair wind, out of St. Andy's Bay, for the channel is wide and straight enough when once you are in it. It took but half an hour to put us out far enough to head on a course which, barring accidents, should take us well clear of Cape San Blas. I determined to keep the deck till I was satisfied with our offing, and with the "charge" brought up by the sounding lead, so I walked my little sailorman's walk with an occasional glance at the binnacle and an eye to the canvas. We caught the breeze free abaft quarter, and went off to sea with the faintly glowing column of smoke directly astern.

After a while I noticed a faint smell on the air suggestive of sulphur, and even went below to see if a match had been accidentally lighted, but I could detect nothing; the smell vanished when I went down the companionway, but I noticed it again, and it seemed to me somewhat stronger as I came on deck. Finally, thinking that it might be my imagi-

nation, I asked the man at the wheel whether he perceived it.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I've been taking notice of it myself."

Then after a pause of a few minutes, during which I suppose he made up his sea-going mind that he might venture upon volunteering a remark, he said, "I guess it's nothing but that volcano, sir."

"What volcano?"

"Well, sir, I don't know much about it; but those Johnnies for'ard say there's a live volcano up in the swamps hereaway."

That was all that he could tell me, but it afforded as satisfactory a solution as anything that I could myself contrive. The sulphurous smell grew less and less perceptible as we ran away before the northerly breeze, or else we got so used to it that we did not notice it, and by midnight I had altogether dismissed it from my mind.

By this time we were far enough offshore to satisfy even the anxieties of an inexperienced navigator like me, so I called Nevers and turned in, thinking to have a good four hours' sleep. But no sooner had I made myself comfortable, and was dropping off into that half-conscious condition that precedes slumber, when I was startled by hearing a voice distinctly speaking close to my ear.

"Jack, Jack, wake up!"

Of course I started, but thinking I had had the

not uncommon experience of a sort of waking dream, I soon dozed off again, only to be aroused by the words, "Benson, Jack Benson, she's off her course."

Glancing up at the telltale compass, I saw that this was false on the face of it, for the ship was pointing west-southwest as I had directed, and that was as safe a course as could be desired under the circumstances.

Mentally resolving to have no more prophetic voices breaking my repose, I closed my eyes again, but still a third time came that persistent voice; this time it was, —

"Go east, Jack, go east," three times in succession.

It seemed to me now that I recognized the voice as that of my uncle, Captain Abram Shumway, though I knew, of course, that he must be more than a thousand miles away in the old New England homestead. But at last I got fairly off to sleep with those same words repeating themselves in infinite succession in my brain, "Go east, go east," until finally, I suppose out of sheer perversity, I dreamed that I kept steering west in a rising sea, which at last became so high that I thought the schooner was going to turn a back somersault. Then I awoke in an agony of fear to find Nevers shaking me.

"You yelled so like the mischief I had to come down," he said, when he saw that I was fairly awake; "I was afraid you'd go off in a fit."

"What did I say?" I asked rather nervously, for

I suppose we are always a little anxious now and then when we find that we have been talking to other people, not knowing what we may have been saying.

"Oh, nothing but professional remarks, such as 'hard aport,' and 'the course is southeast,' etc."

"Nevers," said I, getting out of my bunk, "you may call me a fool, if you like, after we get back to our mess on board the 'Bantam,' but as sure as my name's Benson, I'm going to run her off to the southeast at least until daylight. It may be all nonsense, but if you knew what I've gone through with during the hour or so that I've been asleep, you wouldn't blame me."

Nevers stared, for we had talked the whole matter over the night before, and agreed that it was time to run for the squadron. However, he said nothing beyond this, "Well, it's your lookout. I'm game to see you through; you needn't come on deck, though. I'll gibe her over, and put her on her new course."

So I turned in again, dimly conscious of feeling the direction of the roll changed; hearing the booms eased over and brought up with a rattle against the traveller blocks; while the telltale compass swung round till the lubber's mark touched southeast. That was the last thing that I knew before dropping off into a sound refreshing sleep that lasted until Nevers saw reason to call me after sunrise.

"Boat coming alongside, sir," were the first words that I heard the next morning, and it took me but a very short time to get on deck. We were out of sight of land. I had not worked out the position exactly, but I guessed we must be pretty well off Deadman's Bay; not too far, perhaps, for safety, but far enough to be sure of some water under our keel.

About two miles to windward was a singular craft rapidly running down toward us, with the wind dead aft, and what looked like an immense mushroom sitting immovable in the stern. The glass revealed other objects, animate and inanimate, amidships of the boat, but what they were we could not tell at this distance. The sail was a rude affair of some sort of dark stuff, with a boom and gaff, and as she drew nearer, we presently made out that the boat herself was a large log canoe, probably hollowed from a great cypress tree, and not ungraceful in her lines and proportions.

She was but ill adapted to rough-weather work, and knowing that the Florida Indians were not given to deep-sea navigation, I could not account for her being here out of sight of land. I laid the schooner to so that the canoe might safely come alongside, a manœuvre which her skipper effected rather awkwardly, standing up with a long paddle in his hand, and looking rather resentfully at the two blue-jackets who climbed over into the main chains with boat-hooks, and held the canoe at a safe distance

from the side so that she should not be swamped as the schooner rolled.

The apparition of the mushroom in the stern was now explained: the captain of the canoe was a Seminole Indian, more than six feet tall, a splendid specimen of manhood, somewhat lighter in complexion than his brethren of the North. We weighed him afterward on the ship's scales, which he turned at something near two hundred pounds, but he was well proportioned, athletic in all his movements, and with something of the grace and spring of a wild creature in his step.

Upon his head, to return again to the mushroom, was the extraordinary native head-dress of the Seminole, — a huge turban, projecting nearly a foot from his head on all sides, and having the diameter of a small cart wheel. This was constructed in some mysterious manner out of a large variety of calico handkerchiefs and strips of cotton cloth, which looked as though they might have been picked up from a dozen different wrecks, as indeed, perhaps, they were. Beside him in the canoe was a young man, two not bad looking squaws, four pickaninnies, two live pigs, five or six land turtles, some gourds of water, packages of counti root, and two long Kentucky rifles.

This gigantic personage could speak English, at least to some small extent; but he was anxious about his family and other belongings, and I suppose some sentiment of honor forbade him to leave his canoe

until all the rest were safe on the deck of the schooner. Accordingly, with much laughter among our blue-jackets, the four little Indian babies were passed up over the rail and deposited on the deck, where they sat solemnly sucking their thumbs for all the world as if they had been little Christians. Then their mammas were hauled up after them, without a particle of expression in their faces, and last of all, the young man and the big chief climbed over and looked about them.

As soon as he was relieved of the immediate anxiety occasioned by his being so far out at sea, the Seminole's mind recurred to the purpose that had brought him there. Looking us all over, he evidently could not make up his mind who was the official head of the establishment, so he addressed his remarks in general to the entire ship's company, until he subsequently found out that I was the recognized head, after which no one could have been more punctilious in his observance of the courtesies of official life.

Addressing us all, he remarked briefly, "Big ship aground," and he pointed southeast, lifting up one finger. "Two big ship aground," and he lifted two fingers. "Shoot, bang, big gun, big gale, send Micco for help."

Nevers and I consulted over this. Evidently, some gunboat must be aground, but our efforts to get a more particular description of her from the Indian

signally failed, his nautical vocabulary being too slender to afford the desired information. However, he was very clear as to the direction in which the stranded vessel lay, so we lost no time in heading accordingly.

The breeze held, and in an hour the lookout hailed that he could make out something ahead. Another hour resolved it into our missing "Bantam," but she was something of a wreck to look at, even at that distance. Her masts were gone, and she had not the look of smartness that one always associates with a Yankee man-of-war. Beyond her, and farther in shore, was another steamer, but of her we knew nothing, for she was a stranger and looked as though she might be a blockade-runner. In any event, she was so far off that her character was of very little consequence.

So that, as it turned out, I had not made any mistake in changing the ship's course the night before.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE HEART OF THE HURRICANE.

Not knowing precisely where we were, I had to keep the lead going from the forechains so as to know when we crossed the "three-fathom curve." With a good lookout aloft, I was pretty sure we could avoid any of the outlying knobs that render navigation hereabout so dangerous to the unwary navigator.

"By the mark three! and no-o-o bottom!" sung out the leadsman at five-minute intervals, as he swung the heavy sinker over his head and let it fly forward.

"Shoal water right ahead. — Starboard a little, sir." This from the lookout aloft, and we sheered off in time to avoid an innocent patch of green that looked very pretty and harmless in the sunshine, but which would have put an abrupt end to our cruise had we run into it.

We headed for the "Bantam" again as soon as we had the shoal well abeam. She was only two miles distant now, and I reflected with pardonable exultation that they could without doubt see our colors, which I punctiliously carried as the rules of interna-

tional law direct under such circumstances, namely, the American ensign at the fore, and the British merchant flag aft. Not a soul on board the "Bantam" had ever seen the "Bold Briton" before, and they could not know who was aboard of her. It afforded us a good deal of amusement to speculate as to what kind of a craft they must take us to be, for, by model and rig, we were so essentially un-American that the oldest sailormen on board may well have been puzzled.

"By the mark three!" came at last from the leadsman, then after a pause, "And a half, two!" following the next cast, and as this gave us none too much water under the keel, I was about to fetch her up into the wind when my keen-eyed water pilot aloft hailed to announce a deeper channel further on, leading close up to where the "Bantam" lay.

So I held my course, and the lead soon gave no bottom at three fathom. I kept on till fairly within hailing distance, Nevers and I intentionally keeping somewhat out of sight, so that we should not be recognized. Finally I rounded to, dropped the head-sails, and anchored some two hundred yards from my stranded superior.

I was a little bit in doubt whether naval etiquette required me to hail him first, or to wait for him to hail me; but in a minute came the hail in Morris's voice, "What schooner is that?"

"The British schooner, 'Bold Briton,'" shouted I

through my speaking-trumpet, and still standing partly concealed by the rigging.

"Where are you bound?"

"To Appalachicola, with munitions of war."

"Who are you, sir?"

"Acting Midshipman Benson, sir, with a prize crew from the United States gunboat 'Bantam.'"

I had it on the tip of my tongue to ask, "Have you seen her anywhere?" but did not quite dare. So then I stepped out in plain sight, and Nevers too, and after a moment's scrutiny through his glasses, Morris recognized us, waved his cap, and the crew gave us a cheer.

"Come aboard, will you?"

"Very good, sir. — Away there, second cutter!" and in a few minutes I was being shaken hands with, welcomed and congratulated all at once on the familiar quarter-deck, after a somewhat exciting week of absence. I was told hastily that the steamer inshore was a supposed blockade-runner, which the "Bantam" had chased out into the heart of the hurricane, had followed her into shoal water, and had herself run aground while trying to get within range. The "Bantam," having lost all her boats, was quite unable to follow up her advantage while the other steamer was in a corner.

Save for her missing spars, and the total absence of boats, — six of which ordinarily ranged along the davits, — the "Bantam" on deck looked pretty much

as usual, but there was no time now to waste in gossip.

"How much water do you draw?" asked Morris.

"Nine feet aft, eight and one-half forward, sir."

"Lay her alongside, then. I've got ten feet here, anywhere. You may remain in charge of her for the present."

"Very good, sir." So back I went to the "Bold Briton," took in all sail, broke out the anchor, leaving the crown just clear of the bottom, hoisted the head of the fore staysail, and held it aback till we paid off within a short cable's length of the "Bantam," then I anchored again, and gave her chain enough to pass a line from our stern.

In a few minutes more we were lashed side by side, with some cotton bales that Morris had picked up hung over the side for fenders.

There was just enough swell to make the schooner roll a bit, so that these cotton-bail fenders, worth at that time some five hundred dollars apiece, were ground and rolled and crushed between the two ships in the most reckless and extravagant fashion; but that could not be helped, the ships were worth more than they were.

As soon as we were well fast, it was, "All hands lighten ship." We rigged shears aboard the schooner, and beginning with the "Bantam's" broadside guns, took everything out of her that was heavy and movable and easily within reach; meanwhile sending out

two anchors with heavy hawsers attached, and taking up the slack whenever either vessel gave an offshore roll to the lift of the sea. This brought a tremendous strain on the hawsers, but they stood it, though they made the bitts creak as though they would snap off at the deck timbers, but after several hours' hard work, the "Bantam" slid off into deep water.

Fortunately, it was rather a soft ledge that she had come to grief upon, and the only damage she had received was scratched and dinted copper along her starboard bilge. All three anchors were now hove up, the "Bantam" started her screw, and in a few minutes we let go again in three fathom, and without a pause, except for meals, set about restoring things to their normal condition.

But, alas! no sooner had we hauled off to our new berth than the steamer that had been lying in shore started up her engines, and following a serpentine course twisted in and out among the channels, keeping well out of range till she cleared the shoals, when, hoisting the Confederate ensign to her gaff, she dipped it three times, gave a derisive hoot with her whistle, and steamed away out into the Gulf toward Yucatan as fast as her engines could drive her. She escaped that time; but a few days later a steamer, which we believed to be the same, was taken while trying to run the blockade at Matamoras, so she only had a short respite, after all.

"It taketh longer," saith the proverb, "to mend than it doth to break," and so it took the "Bantam's" crew very much longer to refit than it did to dismantle her. We were at it pretty much all that day and part of the next; but every job has its end, and at last we got the guns all remounted and everything ready for a start.

Our Seminole visitors seemed in no especial hurry to depart. Time is of no account whatever in the Everglades, so they camped on the after deck-house of the "Bold Briton," — a station to which I assigned them as being out of the way. They watched operations with stoical and expressionless faces, only occasionally chattering and laughing among themselves, whenever the busy gangs of sailormen in their white fatigue suits did anything that seemed to them exceptionally funny. Their canoe had remained in the water alongside our boats, and to it the young man was occasionally sent, whenever something with a familiar flavor was required to make good the shortcomings of British merchant supplies, which did not appear wholly to satisfy the Seminole palate.

It was certainly a very ingenious way that they had of carrying pigs and turtles "on the hoof," as it were, for a long voyage. Of course, if they killed them at starting, they would spoil before many hours, but so long as the breath of life remained, they had fresh provisions, and nothing to do but kill and eat, when their appetites called for it.

One of the pigs was a very comical little beast, who seemed to think that he was being abandoned to his fate, whenever the young Indian left the canoe and climbed back aboard the schooner with his provender. The little fellow, who was made fast with a lanyard around his waist, would put his two forefeet upon a thwart, elevate his little pink snout in the air, and howl or squeal most vociferously for several minutes, after he was left alone with the turtles and other supplies, then he would quiet down and go to sleep again in the bottom of the canoe, until he was again disturbed.

McCrady came over to see me as soon as he had a few minutes' interval of leisure, and from him I had the story of the "Bantam's" adventures. After leaving us at Cheecola Bay, Morris got under way, and next morning, after having caught one blockade-runner at the East Pass, he ran down the coast and sighted a steamer headed north in the afternoon. The stranger made off to sea, as soon as she saw the "Bantam," and the latter gave chase till dark, when she lost her in the thickening scud that preceded the storm.

That was the night of the hurricane, and as there was no harbor within reach, Morris made a drag with spars and canvas, and rode to it all night, drifting astern pretty fast, of course, but keeping the screw turning so as to relieve the strain upon the drag.

The sea was terrific, of course, sweeping over the little gunboat, often from stem to stern, and making it necessary for the watch on deck to hold on for their lives to anything within reach. One of the boats was wrenched clear of its lashings and hurled inboard against the standing rigging with such violence that the stays parted, and the top-masts went after them. All the other boats were smashed into splinters at the davits.

The ship made fairly good weather of it, though she was under water half the time, and everybody dreaded lest the big rifles should get adrift and slide overboard in spite of their extra lashings. When at length the dismal dawn broke, Morris, not knowing how far he had drifted during the night, steamed up to his drag, hoisted it aboard, and then worked away to windward, barely holding his own, and easing her over the big seas as much as he could, so as to make sure of an offing. After a time, the rain let up a little, when what should show up out of the murk right ahead, but their blockade-running friend of the night previous. She had apparently ridden out the gale, quite as well as her pursuer, not having so much top hamper, and not being so heavy in the water. She had, indeed, been obliged to throw over some of her deck-load to lighten ship, during the worst of the gale, but that the "Bantams" did not know until they found some of the bales stranded on a reef the next afternoon.

Of course nothing could be done but keep her in sight till the weather moderated. It was quite out of the question to cast loose and work guns in such a sea, nor was it safe to attempt anything beyond riding out the gale as easily as possible.

The Confederate did not seem in the least troubled at the vicinity of the Yankee gunboat, but kept her engines going, and quietly edged away to the southward at every favorable interval; but Morris kept him close aboard, and when the gale broke towards night, the stars afforded light enough to continue the chase as the sea went down. All night long the two steamed in a wide circle, the Confederate evidently aiming to have the coast within reach as soon as day broke.

He made his calculations pretty well, too, for shortly after dawn he made his landfall so nicely that he was able to run straight in toward the breakers, and, being of lighter draught than the "Bantam," found shelter behind a submerged reef, where she could not follow. The reef broke the force of the sea, and in trying to feel her way in after the swell went down, the "Bantam" grounded, and, having lost all her boats, could only take a few consolation shots at the distant Confederate just to convince everybody that it was of no use.

Shortly after this the Seminole canoe hove in sight, and after much signalling under the supervision of Napoleon, who at once sized her up as hail-

ing from the Everglades, her skipper was induced to come alongside.

Napoleon was an adept in sign language, and with McCrady's assistance in interpreting, and his own inferences from the Indian's broken English, a bargain was eventually struck, whereby it was agreed to extend the canoe voyage somewhat further than was first intended, and send back help if he could find it.

He probably sighted the "Bold Briton" long before we sighted him, for he had boldly run right out to sea on the chance of our being the help that he was looking for, as indeed we were.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"BAD MEDICINE"; A MYSTERIOUS STREAM.

EVERYTHING was ship-shape by mid afternoon, and taking my hawser, the "Bantam" started up the coast. It was a trifle ignominious for me to be reduced to my normal condition as a "junior sub," after having held an independent command for several days; but I made the best of it, and before sundown we were safe at our old anchorage in St. Andy's Bay, where it was considered best, under the circumstances, to pass the night, as the "Bantam's" supply of coal was running short.

I had spent a good part of the afternoon in writing out my report, which, when it was finished, I took on board, and presented in due form to Commander Morris.

I was quite proud of it; in fact, I don't deny that I am rather proud of it to this day. A British schooner captured with her cargo of war material and her officers (her crew had been set ashore for reasons at St. Jude's); a Rebel privateer captured and destroyed, and her crew made prisoners; five Rebel cavalrymen with their horses captured on shore; a Rebel transport burned; an attack by a

large superior force foiled and beaten off, and an armed steamer disabled.

It was a pretty good record for a young middy, and Morris was generous enough to give me full credit in his own official report of the expedition, as well as during the talk that we had during that evening, for he invited Nevers and me to come over and dine with him.

It had fallen calm when we went on deck after dinner, and looking toward the mainland, there was the strange glow on the treetops and the spectral column of smoke floating aloft just as we had seen it when here before. Sighting the column as well as I could from the binnacle compass, the bearings were precisely what they were before. We told Morris how the boat's crew had seen it at closer quarters when they were run away with by the devil-fish. Morris was altogether incredulous, and declared that it must be some sort of Rebel works which it was his duty to destroy, and which he declared he would look after on the morrow, if nothing happened to prevent.

When I went on deck next morning and took the sailorman's habitual look to windward and aloft, I noticed several queer-looking lumps of something floating in the water, and calling one of the watch, I sent him in the dingy to see what they were. He sculled about, picked up two or three of the fragments and brought them aboard, when I recognized

them as pumice-stone, such as is used by various artisans for rubbing down and polishing smooth surfaces.

I laid my specimens along the sunny edge of the deck-house to dry, when I was aware of the towering form of Ko-ah-ko-chee standing over me.

"Ho-lee-wah-gus," he said, pointing to the pumice-stone. "Bad medicine, no good, white man throw overboard."

"What is it, Micco?" For we had learned that that was his title, meaning "big chief" in his native tongue. So those of us who caught on to it were very careful to give him the benefit of his full rank.

"Seminole man call him 'stone sponge,' no good, white man throw overboard."

It was in vain that I tried to convince him that in the white man's country this same "stone sponge" was in every-day use. He kept shaking his big head in grave disapproval, and made his squaw and pickaninnies move over to the far side of the deck-house.

Our two vessels lay so near each other that we could easily talk across from one to the other, and seeing Mac on deck, I called over, asking him what he knew about pumice-stone. He knew so much more about most things than the rest of us did that we used to poke fun at him, and ask all sorts of silly questions, so he would not answer till I threw one of my specimens at him, which fell short, but bobbed

up to the surface like a cork, after taking a dive under his very eyes. Then he became interested and had one of the watch pick it up with a scoop net.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"There's quite a lot of it floating about in the bay," I replied. "Where do you suppose it comes from?"

"Must have drifted over from South America, I suppose. It don't grow anywhere except in volcanoes."

The word recalled the story that I had heard from the man at the wheel two days before. I had not thought of the volcano that morning, but now glanced shoreward. No column of smoke was to be seen.

Morris now came on deck and called across, asking me what had become of my volcano. I told him she hadn't fired up yet, and then asked him to look at the pumice-stone which McCrady was still experimenting with.

Napoleon was summoned, and with Mac to translate, it was learned that he had known of this smoke by sight all his life; that nobody knew what it was, but it was called the "Wakulla volcano," and one of the coastwise counties hereabout was named after it.

"That's where the old 'Wakulla' sailing frigate must have got her name," said I, for I had gone over to the "Bantam" so as not to miss any of this conversation. "She was my first ship."

Morris was incredulous about the volcano yarn, but

the smoke was indisputable, so he sent Mac ashore to lay off a base-line on the beach and be ready to triangulate the smoke, if it came to time, which it did before we were done breakfast, and Mac took his angles and figured it out to be about ten miles from our anchorage.

Napoleon said he could carry the "Bantam" around the point and at least five miles nearer in shore, so Mr. Morris decided to see if he could find out what the smoke meant.

Somewhat to my chagrin, I was not given any chance to go upon this expedition, but was left to my own devices with the "Bold Briton" at anchor in St. Andy's Bay, while the "Bantam" steamed away out of sight around the point, and after a while we heard her big rifle fired two or three times, from which we concluded that they had worked up within range.

Micco naturally inquired in his broken English what the "Bantam" was firing at, and when I told him, an unmistakable expression of wrath, not unmixed with fear, came over his face; but restraining himself, he turned without a word, said something to his family in Seminole, upon which his son hastened to bring the canoe alongside, all hands bundled in, and disregarding my friendly overtures and explanations, Micco set his sail to the sea breeze and laid a straight course to the mainland, where he was presently lost to sight, exactly as if the canoe had sailed in among

the tree trunks; possibly, indeed, it had done that very thing, for there were waterways along that coast that only the Indian knew, and now that he is no more, very likely nobody at all, not even the coast-survey people, know about them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WAKULLA.

After finding that his shot did not appear in the least to incommode the smoke, Morris sent off the cutter with Russell in charge, Napoleon for pilot and guide, and Mac for interpreter and general utility. They took along two days' light rations in view of possible delays.

Napoleon seemed to know where he was going perfectly well, and no doubt he did, to a certain extent, for he steered the cutter without once touching bottom over a bad bar and into the mouth of a stream big enough to float the "Bantam" herself, if she could have crossed the bar, and crooked enough to break her in two amidships. There was a strong current running seaward, and occasional fragments of pumice-stone outward bound convinced Mac that they could not be of South American origin. As they ascended, they began to note the wonderful purity of the water, so transparent that it seemed at times actually to magnify objects at the bottom. Fishes and turtles of moderate size would appear to the eye in exaggerated and distorted form. This

quality seemed to increase in intensity till, after having pulled for several miles up the tortuous stream, and through silent aisles of lofty cypresses and palms, there opened out a most lovely little lakelet, hardly more than an enlargement of the stream itself, surrounded by a dense hammock grove. The water was heavenly blue in color, with just a suspicion of green, and looking across it one could see gentle ripplings and disturbances, as if some unseen power was stirring uneasily in the lowermost depths. A few strokes of the oars shot the cutter out into the middle of this pool, when all hands became aware of a curious lifting sensation coming apparently from beneath, and the boat seemed to be pushed sidewise toward the shore.

At Russell's command the men rested on their oars and began to look over the gunwales of the boat, and their officers noticed that they were talking apprehensively among themselves; then Mac looked over, too, and to use his own expression, "I felt as though the whole bottom of the country had dropped out from under us and we were suspended over the hole. I could look down, down, down, through a sort of transparent liquid indigo, and far below I could make out a dim shape of ghostly white, which, as I looked seemed to expand and contract as if it was going through some sort of breathing motion. I have no doubt in the world that the superstitious ones among the crew, if there were any,

thought they were looking at some great white couchant submarine monster down there in the greeny-blue depths.

"Napoleon took one look at it [I am telling the story as nearly as I can in McCrady's words], turned ash color, and immediately tried to crawl under the bow-grating, where he remained muttering what we supposed to be his prayers until the immediate crisis was passed. Russell saw in a minute that the white mass was nothing but a big outcrop of the lime-stone rock that underlies the whole West Florida coast, and said so to me, and the two of us began talking about it in a matter-of-fact way, pointing out to each other and to the men the fish that were swimming about below us, and a big yellow-throated alligator who was holding on with his fore paws to a projecting ledge, and looking up at us as if taking an account of stock.

"We had been obliged to take to our oars again to avoid being carried ashore by the strong set of the current, which seemed to radiate in all directions from the centre of the pool before finally finding its way into the regular outlet. Once again we were nearly in the centre of the pool, when there came two or three bangs against the bottom of the boat from below. There was enough force in the blows to jar the frail timbers from end to end, but no damage was done, and the next second, with a slight scraping and bumping across the strakes, some pieces of

pumice-stone bobbed up alongside, and went off with the current toward the nearest shore.

"I am bound to admit that, taking the cutter's crew collectively, they were pretty well gallied by this time, and Russell ran us ashore in a little cove with a sandy floor that looked very shallow and friendly until we found that it was about three times as deep as we thought it, and the white sandy floor was in perpetual agitation, apparently from currents boiling up through it from beneath.

"However, there was a sure-enough edge to the water when we got to it, and Russell told all hands to jump ashore and stretch their legs. Everybody was a trifle nervous, though; there was a portentous stillness all through the forest, — a total absence of the noises that are usually to be heard, — and the superstitious blue-jackets, contrary to their usual custom when set loose in an unknown country, did not begin a hilarious exploration of the entire neighborhood, as they would assuredly have done had they not been under some kind of spell.

"Napoleon was worse off than the rest, but he recovered his senses to some extent when he got ashore, and I asked him if he had ever been there before. He shook his head, with a scared look.

"'Ever heard of it?'

"'No.'

"By Russell's order one of the men climbed the loftiest tree in the vicinity, taking a pair of marine

glasses and a pocket compass with him, and sighted the smoke rolling up in the thick volumes from behind a wall of trees, apparently not more than two miles distant. He took the bearings carefully, and Russell and I both jotted them down in our note-books. Then with four men in light marching order, Russell set off to follow the line by compass, leaving me in charge of the boat with the remainder of the crew."

CHAPTER XXV.

WAKULLA'S PREY.

"To pass the time," continued McCrady, "as well as to restore the men's spirits, I made a complete circuit of the spring a few hundred feet distant from the water's edge, making sure that there was no trail leading to or from it in any direction. For all that we could discover, the wonderful little lakelet might never before have been visited by human creatures. Then I ordered some of the men into the boat, and with a fishing-line made some soundings and measurements, and figured out the volume of discharge on a blank leaf of my note-book. Of course my measurements were somewhat hasty, but I am quite certain that the discharge at the outlet exceeds three hundred millions of gallons daily.

"Seeing me treat the mysterious spring with such familiarity, Jacky's buoyant spirits rallied, and as the water was of an alluring temperature, as well as most beautiful in color, the men asked if they might bathe, which I gave them leave to do by relays of three or four at a time; but having in mind the big alligator that we had seen, I cautioned them in a friendly way not to venture off soundings.

"When Jacky is on a frolic, however, he does not pay much heed to friendly counsels, and as I had not actually given orders about swimming, thinking that the grewsome warning would be sufficient, the first thing I knew two of them were engaged in a race, and were already part way across the bottomless pool. I caught up a carbine that lay at hand, and stood by ready to shoot if the alligator showed his head, but there was no need, for the swimmers could make no farther progress. The upward rush of water was so powerful that they were irresistibly pushed back toward the bank.

"When the first relay of bathers had dressed, the second relay of four took headers off the boat, where they had stripped, and by common consent struck off together across the pool; they all happened to be good swimmers, and had privately dared one another to swim across the 'big bubble,' as they called it. They were nearly half-way across, when a most startling and horrible thing occurred. Right in front of them, on the crest of the bubble, there arose a human form, partly clad in a torn navy-blue shirt, with the white knife-lanyard of a man-o'-war's man still about his neck. The body turned slowly as it rose half breast high out of water with the impetus of the boiling current, fell over on its back, and floated away toward the margin, gradually sinking below the surface as it ceased to feel the lift of the 'bubble.'

"Four more horror-stricken faces I hope I may never see than those of the men who turned and plunged wildly back toward the sandy cove where lay the cutter. To add to the horror of the situation, the big alligator, who had no doubt been watching all the time, and had gotten over his first timidity at the sight of so many white folks, made a rush, not for the living swimmers, but toward the drowned sailorman. One of the men ashore was ready with his carbine, and gave him a quick shot, which glanced harmless from his tough armor plates, but so effectually frightened him that he retired to his lair in disorder.

"The body, turning gently over and over, sank slowly to the bottom in shallow water and near shore, and ordering two of the men to take boat-hooks, they caught his clothing and easily hauled him in. It was one of our seamen, Jackson by name, one of those who had set out with Russell to find the volcano.

"By the time that we had carried the poor fellow ashore and found that life was certainly extinct, I began to have very grave apprehensions about the fate of the rest of the party. The sun was getting low, and it was time that we heard something from them. A man was sent aloft again, but he could see nothing whatever, and even the smoke was no longer in evidence.

"Night was fast coming on. We fired carbines at

regular intervals, but got no reply. It was out of the question to abandon our shipmates, even if we could have found our way down the tortuous channel after nightfall, so we prepared to bivouac where we were; as there was plenty of scrub palmetto within reach, it was an easy matter to improvise a shelter, and there were hundreds of tons of Spanish moss to be had for the pulling, on which one may sleep very comfortably, though at some risk of rheumatism, unless the moss is well covered with blankets. By working together the men rolled two good-sized logs so that they formed a kind of breastwork in the rear of the bivouac, and all hands turned to and collected a lot of firewood so that we kept up a bright blaze all night, at once to keep up our own spirits, which certainly needed cheering, and to serve as a guide to our shipmates, who might perhaps be wandering in the dark morass beyond.

"Pondering over this mysterious appearance of Jackson's body, I could reach but one conclusion: He had in some way fallen into one of the many 'sink-holes' that abound in this region. Possibly it was miles distant, and he had been carried through the long subterranean tunnel, and shot upward to the light at last as I have described. This theory I gave to my crew for what it was worth, but they did not seem to take much stock in it, judging from their looks. I did not have to repeat my orders about

keeping up the fire, for ours was a pretty wide-awake little bivouac that night.

"Of course a sentry was kept constantly on post with regular reliefs, and about midnight the man on duty called me to look and listen. By going a few paces away from the fire, where we lost the effect of its near-by light, a reddish glow could be seen among the distant treetops accompanied now and then by a bellowing as of distant surf, and occasionally it seemed to us that we could hear faint yells, but of that we were not certain. I had some more carbines fired, but there was no response, so I sat the night out by the fire, pondering what I should do in the morning. Micco Ko-ah-ko-chee relieved me of the responsibility of deciding.

"Just as the first light of dawn was beginning to steal through and over the surrounding forest, the sentry challenged sharply, 'Halt there!' and I heard him cock his carbine. Of course I jumped up, gripping my revolver, and the men tumbled out of their blankets, smartly seizing their carbines and crouching behind the palmetto logs that we had arranged the evening before.

"'What is it?' I asked, joining the sentry.

"'Blest if I know, sir. I saw a big swab of a thing out there among the trees when I challenged, but it's gone now. No, there it is again!' and he threw up his carbine to the ready, but dropped it again with an uneasy laugh, — 'Why, it's Micco himself, sir.'

"At almost the same instant I recognized our gigantic Seminole, who came forward with his stealthy Indian stride, not a leaf seeming to rustle under his foot, not a twig snapping, as he stepped over the fallen palmettoes, holding his hand on high, the fingers wide open in sign of peace.

"He addressed Napoleon in Seminole, and the latter, who was not in the least afraid of anything in flesh and blood, soon gave me to understand that Micco knew where our shipmates were, and that if we would promise to go away at once, they should be delivered to us safe and sound. I gave the necessary promise, addressing Micco directly in English, which I knew that he understood perfectly, and he strode off into the hammock without saying anything further.

"Presently he reappeared, followed out of the dimness by a single file of Indians in what I took to be their war-paint. Certainly there was plenty of paint in fantastic designs, and very little else save breechclouts, war-clubs, and spears, such as one may see depicted in the records of the early Spanish explorers. I did not see any firearms among them. They were all big fellows, and as they came out into the open space, we saw that they carried litters made of canebrake. On the first litter was Russell.

"As soon as my men saw what was coming, they jumped to their feet without orders, and I was afraid some excitable fellow would let off his carbine, in which case it would have been 'all day' with

the rest of us. But it was only curiosity and astonishment on their part. Silently the barbaric procession filed past, each pair of bearers gently laying its burden down, till all the four were apparently sleeping peacefully on the ground, side by side, just in front of our little breastwork of logs.

"According to my count, there were twenty-five Indians all together, and not one of them, save Micco, uttered an audible sound. He stood like a statue almost of heroic size, while his followers were passing and laying down their burdens. He remained till the last of his warriors had silently vanished, then advancing toward me with grave and not unfriendly air, he spoke: —

"'White men go to sleep inside Wakulla's country last night, no wake up yet. Wake up all right by and by. Wakulla much angry, white man shoot big gun at Wakulla's wigwam. Wakulla more angry. When Wakulla get most angry, he let white men sleep dead. But Micco remember good white men aboard ship. No kill. Good-by, white man. Don't try find Wakulla again. You want see him? Look!' And he wheeled about, waving his arm toward two palm trunks that stood like Doric columns, side by side, a little way off in the gloom of the forest.

"As I looked I certainly saw, and so did the rest of the crew, a dark mass of something that looked more like a moving haystack than anything else. It moved, or rolled, or hopped silently into the dim-

ness beyond, and seemed to melt away, rather than depart, as it passed out of sight among the tree trunks. A moment later a shrill cry as of many voices, 'Wakulla, Wakulla,' rang out from the distance.

"And then all was still, save for poor Napoleon, who was grovelling on his knees behind the palmetto breastwork, alternately crossing himself and saying his prayers.

"We looked at each other in silence for an instant, the crew and I, and I am bound to admit that there were some pale faces among us.

"'That's the thing that I challenged, first off, in the morning,' said the sentry.

"'I'm glad you did not let drive at it,' said I; 'that was probably the "big medicine man" of the tribe disguised so as to scare us.'

"Russell and his three remaining seamen were sleeping too soundly to be aroused, being apparently under the influence of some drug, but their breathing was regular, and their pulses strong, so we carried them aboard the boat, and bestowed them there just as they lay on their litters along the thwarts amidships, and you may be very sure that we lost no time in getting out of 'Wakulla's country.'

"I know," said McCrady in conclusion, after he had told me this story, "that I, for my own part, did not breathe freely until we had crossed the bar of the river. There was more than enough mystery about it to suit me, notwithstanding my expressed convic-

tion that Wakulla was nothing but a Seminole medicine man."

The four sleepers did not open their eyes until several hours after we got them back aboard the "Bantam," where the surgeon took charge, but did nothing to bring them to after he had made a preliminary examination. In due time they awoke, one after another, and seemed none the worse for their long sleep.

Their adventures can be related in a few words. An hour or so after leaving us they reached the edge of a tangled jungle, partly swamp and partly morass, which it was well-nigh impossible to penetrate, but by dint of toilsome exertions, hacking at thorny vines with their cutlasses, climbing over great prostrate cypress logs, they worked their way in by compass for half a mile or so, and came to a great sink-hole some two hundred feet across, with a mighty whirlpool wandering about here and there and hungrily swallowing such logs and sticks as came within the reach of its vortex. After resting here awhile, Jackson was sent up a tall tree that stood on the brink of the pool, for the growth here was so thick that the volcano smoke could not be seen from the ground. At this time Russell and his men began to notice a slight sulphurous odor in the air, similar, I suppose, to that which had followed us out to sea a few nights previous. He went up to a considerable height, and after pointing once or twice in a certain direction, hailed the

party below, but could not make himself understood, though his lips could be seen to move. Apparently, he was under some strange influence, and Russell ordered him to come down, but he seemed dazed, went out aimlessly upon a limb, and lost his hold, falling from the overhanging tree into the edge of the whirlpool. When he rose after the first plunge, he was fairly in the grip of the vortex, and vanished after a few turns, just as did everything that fell into that dread maelstrom.

After this, Russell and his men seem to have lost their bearings. They all of them ascribe Jackson's fall and their own confusion to the sulphurous fumes of which I have spoken. They dimly remember approaching darkness, strange forms of men and trees, a glow of fire, and some sort of hot drink that they were made to swallow, after which all was blank till they awoke in their quarters aboard ship.

Napoleon recovered his senses as soon as he felt the deck under his feet again, and was able to pilot the "Bantam" back to where her consort was awaiting her. We buried poor Jackson on the beach of the island near by; his body was considerably torn, apparently by contact with the side of the tunnel through which the subterranean river rushes to its outlet in that beautiful but treacherous spring.[1]

[1] Lest the reader may think that the author has taken unwarrantable liberties with natural facts in this part of the narrative, he begs leave to say that a column of smoke, known as the "Wa-

kulla Volcano," does actually rise almost continuously from the heart of a swamp to the southeastward of Tallahassee. Several attempts, in one of which the author himself took part, and nearly lost his life, have been made to reach the source of this smoke, but none of them have solved the mystery. "Sink-holes" with whirlpools, subterranean rivers, and wondrous springs exist throughout that region, and the author has seen specimens of pumice-stone said to have been brought from the vicinity of the alleged volcano. It is also said on apparently trustworthy authority that the compass loses its touch with the north pole in the depths of this morass.

C. L. N.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PRIZE MASTER BENSON.

Having been an "Acting Assistant Prize Master" under Ensign Cayvan, and having been obliged by force of circumstances to appoint myself Prize Master of the "Bold Briton," after having captured her, I felt that I had some little experience in that line of duty. But until the "Bantam" returned from the Wakulla expedition, I was a sort of pretender.

We had gone to work as soon as the "Bantam" was out of sight, rigging new spars in the place of those carried away in the fight with the "Ranger," and before night we had both top-masts aloft, a new jib-boom run out, and square top-sail yards sent up forward, so that when the "Bantam" ranged up to her old anchorage alongside, we were a very ship-shape looking craft, so far as taut rigging and a clean deck were concerned.

This was quite early in the morning, and about the middle of the forenoon Morris sent for me to come over, and handed me an order regularly appointing me Prize Master in charge of the "Bold Briton," and directing me to proceed to Key West

and turn the vessel over to the authorities there for adjudication. I was directed, moreover, to stop at the Dry Tortugas on the way and leave my Confederate captives, for this vast and lonely fortress on a coral reef, almost at the very source of the Gulf Stream, was then used as a military prison.

Nothing save perhaps some more straightaway excitement in the way of an action could have suited me better, — an independent command, a good strong crew, and a summer voyage under sail across a tropic sea, with always the chance of picking up a blockade-runner. It was like having one's own private yacht, without the burden of paying expenses, and with the proud conviction that I was doing my duty as an officer of the navy.

The trip, however, proved quite uneventful. The run to the Tortugas, with the trade wind blowing steady on my port bow, took only three days, and that to Key West, straight to windward, about as many more. Then we had to wait several days for a transport going to New Orleans, and thence we rejoined the "Bantam" with the Gulf Squadron off Mobile.

The summer was pretty well along by this time, and everybody knew that Farragut's fleet was not staying outside Mobile Bay just for amusement — it was tedious business for us, however. Mobile was almost the last port where it was possible for blockade-runners to make an entrance. The presence of

the fleet had pretty much stopped this traffic, and the routine duties of a man-of-war were all that saved us from unbearable ennui.

About this time we received the news of the "Kearsarge-Alabama" fight off Cherbourg, in June. The rest of the world had known of it for a month, but we of the Gulf Squadron had to wait for our trustworthy news to come round about from the North. Confederate rumors and versions we had in plenty, but according to these all fights were victories for their side, or, if not actual victories, were strategically explained as such.

There was great rejoicing in the fleet over the sinking of the famous Rebel cruiser in such a fair fight, for the two vessels were as evenly matched as is possible in such cases; and if Captain Semmes had not thought that there was a fair chance for him to win, he need not have notified the United States Consul of his intentions. That he did this appears from his personal narrative.

At all events, we had a grand rejoicing over the news, for the "Alabama's" crew were mainly English, and a goodly number of them were trained artillerists from English schools of instruction. It was a matter of professional pride with our Yankee gunners, that we could still beat Johnny Bull at his own game on the high seas, even as our fathers did before us.

We were kept busy at gun and boat drills, and

putting out imaginary fires, and stopping make-believe shot-holes, and now and then some of us went in and tried our long-range guns on the forts, but nothing serious was attempted. One day, about the middle of July, Morris was signalled to come aboard the flagship "Hartford," and when he returned all officers were summoned aft into his quarters, and he told us that the "Bantam" had been ordered down the coast again on somewhat urgent reconnoitring duty. The Admiral had decided to borrow all the officers and men who could reasonably be spared, as some of his own ships were short of their full complement.

"Accordingly," said Morris, "I am to transfer to him three officers and twenty-five seamen to be distributed among the fleet where they are most needed. Do any of you particularly want to volunteer?"

We certainly did not all speak at once. I do not know what the others thought, but I was of two minds about it. There was likely to be some fun down the coast wherever the "Bantam" was going, and very possibly if I went with her, I should get back before the grand attack on Mobile. I had very nearly determined to stay by my own ship, when chance took the matter out of my hands.

No officer likes to have his crew drawn upon in this way, but "orders is orders," as Jacky says. This was very different from an ordinary call for volunteers, which would have met an instant re-

sponse. But unless a move was made sooner than anybody expected, duty with the squadron would at best be monotonous and nothing different from our ordinary life; so after waiting a moment Morris said, "Well, gentlemen, if you will not go of your own accord, I shall have to detail three of you," and he ran his eye over us as if considering whom he could best spare with least inconvenience to himself and the "Bantam."

Upon this Mr. Dabney, the second in command, asked if he might make a suggestion.

Morris nodded.

"Why not draw lots for it?"

"All right, that will suit me, and if anybody is dissatisfied perhaps he can pair off as they do in Congress."

So fourteen shot-gun wads were counted out, three of them marked with an X, and all shaken up together in a cap. Acting Master Duffield drew one, McCrady another, and I the third, and such is the contrariness of human nature that no sooner were we out of the captain's quarters than we were overwhelmed with offers to exchange, which immediately convinced us that we were in great luck, and we would not have given up our chance to stay with the fleet upon any consideration.

The twenty-five Jackies volunteered without any hesitation, for there is always a considerable percentage of dissatisfied ones before the mast on every

man-of-war who are glad to make a change whenever the opportunity offers, and equally ready to change back again when the time comes.

Within an hour or two we were all on board the flagship, and after we had reported our arrival to the fleet captain, we were dismissed to await assignment to different vessels of the fleet. As we all knew some of the junior officers, the time passed pleasantly enough, for the "Hartford" was a historic ship, standing for the sailor of that day almost where the old "Constitution" stood for his forefathers. She had been wounded in spars and hull scores of times, had defied heavier hostile batteries than any other ship afloat. A few of her crew had been with her ever since the beginning of the war, and of course these celebrities were all pointed out to us with the scars and shot-holes that had been patched up after the various actions in which she had taken part.

After a time I was aware of the Admiral taking his constitutional on the high quarter-deck, and being a stranger I naturally straightened up and saluted as he passed near me and caught my eye. He saw that I was not one of the "Hartford's" regular company, and so courteously stopped to ask what ship I came from, evidently not remembering me at all till I told him that I was a "Bantam."

"Oh, to be sure," he said; "I remember you now, though I have forgotten your name — Benson? Yes. Well, I don't think you've made any mistake in joining.

I hope we shall give you something to do before very long. Glad to see you aboard the 'Hartford.'" He nodded in a friendly way, and resumed his walk. A little later, a messenger brought me word that Captain Perceval Drayton had sent for me, and I was shown into his quarters, where he sat at a desk with his secretary, Mr. Hegginbothom, at work near by. Drayton was executive officer of the flagship, and was serving also as fleet captain, so that he had a deal of official correspondence on his hands.

I remained standing, cap in hand, near the door, and for a few minutes he did not notice me. Then looking up, "You are from the 'Bantam,' are you?" he said, without prelude.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever been under fire?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Hatteras Inlet, sir, the monitor fight in Hampton Roads, a number of boat expeditions, and at St. Jude's Sound only the other day."

He glanced up at me quickly and then down at a memorandum that lay on his desk, where he seemed to refresh his memory while looking up my full name. Then he arose and came forward with a cordial manner that he could assume upon occasion, and shook hands heartily.

"Really, I'm very glad to see you. You see, I read your name without fairly taking it in. I'm apt

to be awfully absent-minded when I'm not on deck. That must have been a very pretty fight down on the sound. Quite like the War of 1812. I'll speak to Kimberly about your station."

So I was dismissed, and at afternoon quarters was duly assigned to one of the gun divisions on the spar-deck where, thanks to my training aboard the "Minnesota," I found myself quite at home, and knew just what was expected without any instructions.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN ORDER OF BATTLE.

We were a formidable fighting fleet off Mobile Bay, as July drew to an end in 1864. We could, without doubt, have destroyed the combined fleets of England, France, and Spain, as they engaged at Trafalgar, if only the old ships could have been resurrected from their ocean beds and brought to confront us. We could probably have defeated any fleet in the world that could have been assembled at that time, and, of course, we were correspondingly proud of our supremacy.

Leaving out the transports and sailing craft not counted in the fighting division, we numbered eighteen men-of-war, from the stately flagship "Hartford" and her full-sparred consorts with their big batteries, to the still more formidable monitors with their invulnerable turrets and their fifteen-inch guns.

In my opinion, of course, the squadron was badly handicapped by the absence of the "Bantam"; but maybe she would be back in time after all, and in any event, it was a satisfaction to be numbered among the men behind Farragut's guns.

We were only waiting for the monitors now, one

or two of them being around at the Pensacola Navy Yard undergoing repairs. Otherwise, everything was ready, — top-masts sent down, sand-bags piled along the starboard battery, for that side would be terribly near the principal fort in running the gauntlet. Chain cables were stopped outboard to protect the machinery, and a temporary breastwork of hammock bags and the like was built up around the wheel so as to shield the steersman from splinters and small shot.

Never before had I seen such complete and careful preparations for battle. Most of the engagements that I had participated in had not been so long in contemplation. With me, it had been a call to quarters at short notice, and these elaborate arrangements were new to me. But then running past heavily armed forts commanding a narrow channel had never before fallen to my lot, and I began to think that there were some phases of naval warfare with which I was still unfamiliar.

It was not particularly inspiring to look over the rail day after day, at those low-lying, formidable masses of masonry on shore, and occasionally to see the distant bulk of the ram "Tennessee," which the Confederacy believed was capable of sinking the entire Federal fleet, just as they had believed that the "Virginia" was capable of doing for us two years before.

She was, indeed, very much like her prototype,

which I had seen in Hampton Roads, except that she was improved in many respects, being better armed with English rifle guns, and protected at her vulnerable points by something like ten feet of iron-plated sponsons and timber backing. She had, too, three consort steamers with batteries of considerable weight, by no means despicable antagonists.

Besides the known and visible obstructions across part of the ship channel, there were unknown ones in the shape of torpedoes across the rest of it up to within a few hundred feet of the parapet of Fort Morgan, where a narrow passage had been left open for the convenience of blockade-runners. It was believed, of course, that the fire of the fort at such short range would make it impossible for anything to run past alive.

At last August came in, and on the fourth day of the month, the "Tecumseh," the one monitor for which we were waiting, arrived, and we all knew that, barring accidents, the hour of action was close at hand. I am not going to deny that I felt rather downhearted, and pretty much everybody on board was much of the same mind. There was a good deal of writing good-by letters, and doing up little packages and the like. I did something in that line myself, and gave it to Captain Drayton's secretary, Mr. Hegginbothom, to keep for me until after the action. He was killed, poor fellow, at his supposed post of safety below, and I, though on deck throughout

the fight, came off with comparatively little damage.

Even the Admiral himself was uneasy and restless throughout this night before the battle. To his wife he wrote: —

"I am going into Mobile in the morning, if God is my leader, as I hope He is, and in Him I place my trust. If He thinks it is the place for me to die, I am ready to submit to His will. . . . God bless and preserve you and my dear boy if anything should happen to me." [1]

Night came down warm and depressing with sultry showers and fog, and the Admiral must have been uncertain about ordering the attack until some hours after midnight, when it was reported to him that a breeze had sprung up from the westward. "Then we will go in this morning," he said, and that was the first word that he uttered to anybody indicating that the final decision had been reached. Shortly after this, just at daylight, the boatswain piped, "Up all hammocks," and those of us who were on deck could hear, in the calm silence of the lovely morning, notes of silver whistles ringing out from the different ships of the squadron as they lay heaving gently at their anchors on the glassy sea.

Shortly after five o'clock all hands had their coffee, and the Admiral with his fleet captain were still at

[1] This letter is published in full in the Life and Letters of Farragut by his son.

table together. The old gentleman drank tea in preference to coffee, and it had just gone three bells when he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone, setting down his cup, "Well, Drayton, we might as well get under way." There was hardly a half minute's wait. Flag signals were already bent on to the halyards in anticipation of being wanted for instant use, and it was said that, by the official time, every vessel in the squadron had run up the answering pennant inside of a minute and a half. Every captain knew his place in line, and without waiting for further orders, each one of the smaller vessels got up her anchor and steamed alongside of the larger craft which she had been detailed to accompany.

A heavily armed, side-wheeled, double-ender, the "Metacomet," Lieutenant Commander Jouett, was our consort, and he came dashing up alongside at a rate that looked as though he intended to run us down. But he had practised that sort of thing before, and in a few minutes the hawsers were fast, and we were firmly lashed side by side, so that if our machinery was disabled our companion ship might perhaps be able to tow us out of danger. So with all the others of the fleet. They were arranged in pairs, except the monitors, and in one instance, at least, this double-team arrangement proved effective in saving both ships.

The great naval battle of Mobile Bay has been so fully described in official reports, as well as in per-

sonal narrative, that there is little that I can tell, having been most of the time a sort of supernumerary stationed in the wake of the starboard guns, watching my especial crews, and ready to "drop" on anybody that shirked. This station gave me small opportunities for observing incidents as they concerned the individual ships.

It was rather trying to the nerves, to say the least, the long wait after the engines began to throb and the ship gained headway. That's where discipline tells. A crew that has not been properly trained to patience, obedience, and fortitude is very apt to go to pieces under the tense excitement of waiting for an action to begin, but it was not so with the crew of the "Hartford." The Admiral had enough to attend to in the general discipline of his fleet, but his immediate subordinates had been carefully chosen, and although the crew was largely composed of men who had not before been under fire, its morale was excellent, as the event proved.

From my post on deck, I could not see much excepting the spars of the "Brooklyn" and the "Octorora," side by side right ahead, and those of the "Richmond" and her consort immediately astern. I remember thinking that they seemed dangerously near, and expected momentarily to hear the snapping of spars or the crash of a collision. These all came in good time, but not just as I expected.

Above the high bulwarks and through the open

ports, we could catch occasional glimpses of the dark, low-lying monitors, looking like huge, misshapen water-bugs, and heading so as to keep close in under the guns of the forts.

The final signal to go ahead came a little before six o'clock, and the whole squadron moved off, falling into column as it advanced. Orders were to go slowly and under low head of steam, and it was a full hour before the monitors, which were a little in advance, found themselves within range, and the "Tecumseh" sent her two fifteen-inch shells over Fort Morgan. They burst in pretty little white puffs against the sky over the silent guns. Then the "Brooklyn" spoke, and our own bow rifle, but still there was no response from the fort, and I began to fear with a pronounced "want-to-go-home feeling" that they were going to trust the lines of sunken torpedoes to do our business for us. The dread of torpedoes was ever present throughout that run up Mobile Bay. We had counted the cost beforehand, and many of us thought that the fleet was bound to lose at least one-third of its numbers from torpedoes alone. If we could win through into the bay with ten or a dozen ships fit for duty, it was all we expected. But it is not a pleasant thing to go ahead, feeling that at any moment a tremendous explosion may take place right under your keel.

The fort began firing at last, after waiting until

we had come within grape-shot range, and at the same time the big ram "Tennessee" and her consorts, who lay right ahead, began firing their long-range guns, their huge conical projectiles raking down our line with deadly effect. Shot and splinters began to fly about our ears, but the Admiral stood, glass in hand, quite unconcerned to all appearance, and looking very much as his bronze statue does on its granite pedestal in New York; and Captain Drayton standing by the quarter-deck rail seemed quite as cool as he, though many a nervous glance was turned toward them from among the crew.

At length, after an interminable period of waiting, our forward broadside guns began to bear, and the painful tension relaxed with a snap. One after another the big black monsters roared out at their open ports, and jumped back with the recoil, to be sponged, loaded, run out, and fired over and over again with relentless swift precision, by their well-trained crews.

We were serving grape-shot now, and so were the enemy from their water-front guns. The cheerful hails of "nobody hurt yet," which had been passing from gun to gun aboard the "Hartford," ceased abruptly. Instead, there were howls or groans according to temperament. Smears of red blood appeared on the white deck, and a dismal procession of pallid men staggered past, or were carried by their shipmates to the surgeons below.

A mountain of dense smoke drifted up from our battery and over toward the fort. There was the old Admiral up in the main rigging, where he could see better, and beside him, a few feet lower down, stood Commander Jouett, on the starboard paddle-box of his ship, so that the two were within easy talking distance.

About this time cheers suddenly broke out on board the "Brooklyn," and we of the flagship took them up, not knowing what it was all about, but they passed on down the line from ship to ship. It was purely an accident, but it coincided by chance with the most dreadful disaster of the day to the Federal fleet. The monitor "Tecumseh" ran upon a torpedo just before these most untimely cheers broke out, there was a dull explosion, a column of water shot up alongside, her bottom was blown in, and down she went, taking with her more than one hundred of her crew. Commander Craven ordering the pilot out ahead of him, through the only avenue of escape, went down with his ship.

And just here a most gallant deed was done by Ensign Nields. Commander Jouett, from his station on the paddle-box of the "Metacomet," had seen the "Tecumseh" sink, and being ever prompt to act, sent Nields in charge of a boat to pick up any survivors who might remain afloat. In less time than it takes to write it down, Nields was at his place in the stern, shoved off and let the boat swing round under the

counter of the "Hartford," with his six blue-jackets jumping her straight in through the powder smoke toward where the monitor sank.

Glancing mechanically over his shoulder, Nields noticed that his colors were not set. So he reached under the after seat where they were kept, pulled off the weather case, and thrust the staff into its step. This cool act saved near a score of lives, for one of our gunners, seeing the boat dimly through the smoke, had just trained a hundred-pounder rifle upon it, thinking it had something to do with torpedoes, when the flag was shaken out just in time to prevent him from jerking the lock-string. So Nields and his dauntless blue-jackets pulled away, the pitiless drive of shot tearing through the air just above their heads, and lashing the water around them, to where the sea still swirled with the downward plunge of the ill-fated "Tecumseh."

To the honor of the Confederate gunners at Fort Morgan and on the "Tennessee" be it recorded that they spared this gallant crew, allowed them to rescue the exhausted men who were struggling in the water, and row back to the fleet.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"RUN HER DOWN."

HARDLY had Nields started on his errand of mercy when something went wrong with the "Brooklyn." I was busy training my guns further aft, and was only dimly aware that our screw had reversed, and that hoarse hails were passing back and forth overhead. Somebody said "torpedoes" (we were all thinking them), and the fire of the "Brooklyn" fell away as she and her consort swung around almost across our bows. I could not hear all that passed, but as the answers from the other ship ceased, I did hear the Admiral shout from his place well up in the main rigging, —

"Go ahead! four bells, Captain Drayton."

It was the only thing to do; the flagship got way on her again, and passing the "Brooklyn," led the fleet across the death-line. The men down in the magazines actually heard the iron torpedo-cases banging and scraping along the ship's bottom as we passed over them, but Heaven had us in its keeping, and in five minutes more we were crossing the bows of the

"Tennessee," catching some hard hits from her big rifles and from those of her three companion gunboats.

These last fled as soon as they saw that we had defiantly passed the ordeal of the sunken torpedoes and were still afloat. The swift "Metacomet" was off after them like a greyhound, and they all disappeared in the gray of a rain squall that came up across the bay.

The flagship was well out of it, nearly a mile ahead of the rest of the fleet, which had with some difficulty straightened itself out under a scorching fire, after the momentary check that I have described. It was getting terribly punished, but was replying with unabated energy, and so were the monitors, which pressed on in spite of the fate of their leader. In half an hour the last crippled couple in that dread promenade came limping in, — Commander Mullaney minus an arm, his ship, the "Oneida," with her engine disabled, and with a row of dead and dying men in the sick bay.

Here we all were, however, afloat save only the lost "Tecumseh," and I suppose that when the boatswain piped to breakfast, and the red "grub pennant" went up to gaff and yard-arm, we were as proud a set of powder-blackened sailormen as ever trod a deck.

But Admiral Buchanan, C. S. N., had his own notions about the proper time for breakfast, and no

consideration whatever for the wishes of his old shipmate, "Davy" Farragut; so after inspecting his ship, and finding her practically uninjured, he got under way, and steamed slowly up the bay, heading direct for the flagship.

No man ever faced great odds more gallantly, and remembering the achievements of the "Virginia" in Hampton Roads, and of the "Albemarle," "Arkansas," and their sisters, he probably thought that he had a chance of winning even here. He knew how the "Arkansas" had run through a powerful Federal fleet, suffering but insignificant damage, and believing that the forts must soon surrender, he perhaps intended to escape up the bay or out to sea, and so prolong the fight. But Fate willed otherwise.

"Here comes the ram," was the cry along the gun decks.

"Buck is coming out," said the Admiral to Drayton, after a look through his marine glasses. "Get under way at once, and signal all vessels to run down the ram."

Mess kids were shoved aside into the waterways; a few of the men got a swallow of coffee, but waited for no more. Gun vents were served and primed, officers and men sprang to stations, and the old "Hartford" was again ready for action, ready to burst into flame from every port at the word of command.

And so it was throughout the fleet. Every ship seemed eager to try her wooden prow against the enemy's iron ribs. I could not see very much that was going on, but I knew when we charged down upon the ram and crashed our stout oaken timbers against her guards; in a minute more we had swung around alongside, and my guns came to bear. The ram and the flagship scraped along, each with her port battery firing as fast as it could be loaded, directly into the sides of her opponent. The two guns that had now fallen to my charge, with their muzzles well depressed, were hurling ineffectual solid shot against the slanting iron roof only ten feet distant. Half the fleet crowded about the monster ram. I heard a tremendous crashing and crunching of timbers, and a stunning explosion, and then — oblivion.

It was the "Tennessee's" dying effort. So close to our broadside was the muzzle of the gun last fired, that the flash scorched our paint. The big shell, tearing through the planking and timbers of the flagship, burst in the berth-deck, killed Ensign Hegginbothom and four seamen, and wounded eight others. A heavy fragment ranged up through the spar-deck; a young middy on duty there reeled and fell. He was carried below by men from one of his guns. Glancing at him hastily, for he was very busy, the surgeon thought him dead, and ordered

him laid in the port waterway, with the long stark row of his shipmates.

"That makes twenty-six," said the surgeon's steward, jotting down this entry in his memorandum-book: "Benson, John, Acting Midshipman, detailed from 'Bantam,' killed."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR MEETING.

Did you ever wake up so imperceptibly after a sound night's rest that you did not know where slumber ended and consciousness began? If you have, you may perhaps understand how I came back to consciousness. Slowly drifting from the unknown, I first heard voices and then the churning of paddle-wheels, and at last got an eye open and saw a Confederate uniform with a man inside of it lying on the deck near me.

What had happened? Had the ram destroyed the entire fleet, and was I a prisoner? Presently I saw Nields go past (he who had rescued the "Tecumseh's" men off Fort Morgan). I could not catch his eye the first time, but when he came near again I managed to get his attention. He kneeled down beside me saying, —

"Don't exert yourself, Benson; the surgeon says it won't do."

"Tell me where I am, anyway, and what day is it?"

"It's the same day, the day of the fight, and you

are aboard the 'Metacomet'; we are taking all the wounded to Pensacola."

"Did we sink the ram?"

"No, but we captured her, and we've got the Rebel admiral on board here. He was hard hit in the leg."

"What's the matter with me?"

"We don't know exactly, something hit you on the head, just as we were finishing the ram, and you haven't known anything since; better keep still now."

"One thing more. Who is this Reb next me?" I asked.

Nields looked at a slip of paper that was pinned to the Confederate officer's coat. "Captain Randolph Tolliver, volunteer artillerist, ram 'Tennessee.'"

I had not energy enough left even to be interested in this piece of news, so I dropped off into semi-consciousness again, and knew nothing more till I found myself in a hospital cot with a bandaged head and a very lame shoulder, and saw dimly the soft green leaves of a tall banana gently waving outside the open casement. There was a nearby murmur of hushed and pleasant voices, and presently I was aware of a queer sniffing noise close to my ear. Something jumped up on my cot, touched my cheek, and cuddled down beside me. After some ineffectual and half-hearted trials I opened my eyes enough

to see a little, and there, half-reclining on a cot like my own, was a young man, not far from my own age, whom I at first failed to recognize, but who had on a gray hospital gown that might easily have passed for a Confederate uniform. Near him, seated on camp stools, were two figures that somehow seemed more familiar, except that they were in deepest black; but I couldn't make it out, and closed my eyes again for sheer weakness.

Then, after a time, I heard a well-remembered voice, calling, "Here, Wag, come here, sir. — He is just 'possessed' to watch poor Mr. Benson." There followed a soft brushing as of skirts moving across the floor. Then there was a little tussle, and a canine whimper, and I opened my eyes and saw a tall slender figure standing at the foot of my cot, and holding in her arms a little yellow dog who was anxiously watching me with his head cocked to one side.

"Edith," I heard this apparition say; "Randolph — look here, I believe Mr. Benson is waking up."

There was a subdued rattle of crutches, and the rustle of another dress, and I heard a man's voice say, —

"Quick, Helen, give him that dose that the doctor left."

Something was deftly pressed against my lips by cool soft fingers, and I was conscious of mechanically swallowing a liquid that seemed to set my

blood a tingling, and clear away a misty veil from before my eyes. I saw my old acquaintance, Randolph Tolliver, with a crutch under either arm, and one leg bandaged from thigh to knee. And who were those sombre sisters who stood so silently, and looked at me with such strangely questioning eyes? Surely they were the two about whom Commander Morris had badgered me months before in the cabin of the "Bantam," and told me that it was written in the Book of Fate that I should meet them again.

And here we were, sure enough, in an airy room, with wide windows looking out across the beautiful, oak-shaded grounds of Pensacola Navy Yard.

We had last been together in a little ship's boat under the great guns of the "Wabash."

But the number was not now the same, then there were five of us in the boat. I wondered, in an apathetic way, who was missing. But opiates and concussion of the brain do not stimulate mental curiosity. It was very hard work to keep my eyes open, so I did not try, but lay quite still seemingly asleep, but hearing the talk that went on among my three companions.

"It's no use, girls," said Tolliver, "you can't make nature go any faster than she wants to. He's pretty badly hurt. That last shot of the old 'Tennessee' did for five Yankees anyhow, and Mr. Jack Benson here, whom you are so anxious about, may very likely

make a sixth. Serve him right, too, especially if he killed Haines, which I more than half believe."

"Stop, Randolph," — it was his sister's voice, — "you shall not talk so, when the only way we can find out about Haines is to nurse him back to life. I for one am going to do my best for him."

"If I thought he had really killed brother, I'm not sure that I could find it in my heart to help you, Helen; but he seems to be the only one who knows about it, and I shall do my best. So will Randolph, I know; he's being treated too well himself to cherish malice against a wounded enemy, even though it be a Yankee."

"You are right, Edith," said Tolliver; "he was a gentleman, even when he was only a sailor-boy. I know very well that I am unreasonable, but this leg of mine smarts so and I do so want to be back with my battery again. I reckon the Confederacy is about done for, but I'd like to be on hand for the finish, for all that."

"Well, I'm glad you're not," said his sister; "and if it were not rank treason I could almost bless the Yankee that so nearly shot your leg off the other day."

"Thanks; maybe it was that very one over there on the cot yonder. I understand he had charge of two guns on the Yankee flagship."

"Hush, Randolph; here comes the doctor."

Steps drew near along the gallery. Wag barked,

as in duty bound, though he knew perfectly well who it was, and there came a cheery voice from the open door, —

"Good afternoon, young ladies. How are our patients? How's the leg, Captain Tolliver?"

"Oh, I suppose it's getting along all right. It spoils my temper, though, with what you fellows call 'knitting pains.'"

"Yes, I know; they always do that way when they're healing. You ought to be reasonably happy, though, with two such nurses. You are a privileged character, I can tell you, sir, thanks to them."

"Oh, yes, that's all very well. But it's the being here at all that worries me, when my country needs every man she can get."

The doctor's voice hardened a trifle. "Your country! You may as well stow that kind of talk, young man. You're in my charge, and I'll do the best I can for you, professionally, but don't exasperate me needlessly by your secesh nonsense. I beg pardon, young ladies, but I'm a Southerner myself, and my state as well as yours is at this minute suffering from the folly of her politicians. But this won't do; let's change the subject. How's our middy?" and he came across to me, felt my pulse, deftly raised my eyelids for a look at the pupils, heard from the young ladies how I had showed signs of returning consciousness an hour before, and wrote the inevitable prescription.

With the contrariness of an invalid who is com-

fortable, although I knew all that went on about me, I would not give a sign of intelligence.

"He will get his senses back before many hours," said the doctor, after he had completed his examination. "Now, young ladies, you must go out and take the air, or I shall have you on my hands too. I'll leave my steward here in charge."

The doctor departed on his rounds, and there followed gentle sounds of preparation, and then light footsteps went off down the gallery, and I was left alone with Tolliver and the steward.

Two or three days more passed before I began to mend; but when at last the corner was turned, I rallied very rapidly. My skull had been badly fractured, by the bursting shell, and a very critical operation had been skilfully performed by the post surgeons at Pensacola.

Partial power of observation and memory came back to me before that of speech, and for some days I could only lie still and hear what went on in the room. I gathered from the conversation that Tolliver and I had been, purely by accident, assigned to the same room, and shortly afterward the two young ladies, with their colored attendant, had appeared at the picket lines in the rear of Pensacola, armed with a letter from General Liddell to the Federal commander, requesting that they be admitted to attend Tolliver, who was understood to be dying.

They had been at Mobile for some time, and had heard indirectly of Gordon's capture and subsequent death. As his entire party had been taken and sent to prison, they had never heard any particulars.

After Farragut's victory at Mobile Bay, they had determined to go at once to Pensacola, and bring Tolliver home as soon as he could bear the journey. This plan they had carried out, all save the taking of their patient home, to which the Federal commander would by no means consent until he could be properly exchanged.

The surgeon's steward was an old man-of-war's man, temporarily detailed for shore duty in the hospital, — a sturdy old fellow, William Conway by name, who had been at the navy yard when it was surrendered to the Confederates. We three — Tolliver, Conway, and I — were left alone for several hours almost daily, while the young ladies were off duty; and although the two were at swords' points on all matters relating to the war, they were friendly enough otherwise, and could not help chatting together. I found my interest in mundane things begin to return, although most of the time I lay apparently heedless of what went on about me. One day, in particular, my interest was aroused by the old sailorman's plain narrative of a deed that became somewhat famous.

"Yes, sir," said he; "I was on duty here when Florida seceded. Captain James Armstrong was in

command of the yard, and we mistrusted he was rather more than half on your side, because he was a Kentuckian by birth. There wasn't any manner of doubt about his daughter, though. She was a Union girl clean through, and all the yard knew it; and she made no bones about telling the 'old man' what she thought of him. Why, sir, when she heard him say that he could not hold the yard with only thirty-one men, she ups and tells him that she would defend it herself with a dozen till the government sent help. If he would have let her call for volunteers from amongst us blue-jackets, she'd have done it, too, and we'd have stood by her to a man."

Tolliver did not seem very much edified by this evidence of loyalty on the part of a girl, who, from his point of view, ought to have been a good Rebel, but Conway took no notice.

"You see, sir," he went on, "Lieutenant Slemmer of the army had a company of forty-eight regular infantry over at Barrancas, and he stood off one party of Rebs that demanded his surrender. He knew well enough, of course, that he couldn't hold the place agin the twelve hundred or so Confederates that were camped about Pensacola. So he just spiked his guns one night, and moved across the harbor to Fort Pickens, which was easier defended, before anybody knew what he was about.

"Two days after that, January 12, '61, it was, if I don't forget, Colonel Chase, commanding at

Pensacola, sent a formal demand for the surrender of the navy yard, and backed it up with two or three well-equipped battalions of sogers. Springfield rifles they had out of the arsenal seized a few days before at Chattahoochee.

"We was ready to stand to our guns, of course; but Captain Armstrong and Lieutenant Renshaw didn't call us to stations, and the first thing we knew that morning, we was ordered to fall in and mustered at the flagstaff, where we had 'colors' made as usual at eight o'clock. We was only thirty-one men and without arms, when in comes a battalion of gray-coated Rebs at a double-quick, and orders arms on the parade in front of us.

"'Conway,' says Lieutenant Renshaw to me, 'haul down the colors.'

"'Not any,' says I, and I puts my hands in my pockets and stands stock still a-lookin' at him. Now you know, sir, naval officers ain't used to be answered back that way, and no more ain't good sailormen given to answering back. I quite expected he'd draw on me, and if he had I was a-goin' for him, mutiny or no mutiny. He looked mighty angry for a minute, but thought better of it, so one of the Rebs hauled 'Old Glory' down.

"Miss Armstrong, she stood by crying, and we blue-jackets, being unarmed and nobody to take command, couldn't do nothing no more nor she could.

"As the flag settled down on the ground, Renshaw drew his sword and ran it through the bunting, setting his foot on it as it lay on the ground. I can tell you it made us all wince to look at it, and it was altogether too much for Miss Armstrong. She came right forward with the tears streaming down her pretty cheeks. She laid hold of the flag and kissed it, and then what does she do but ketch hold with her two hands and rip the Union out of the corner, rolling it up and holding it tight in her arms. It was the big four-fathom flag, and the Union of it alone was bigger nor she was. 'There,' says she, 'you may keep the stripes, Mr. Renshaw, but I'll take the Union, and bring it back safe and sound again some day.' With that, off she went to her quarters, and we blue-jackets gave her a cheer, and nobody stopping us, we all got our dunnage and went over to Fort Pickens, helping the army garrison there till after a while reinforcements came from the North.

"Maybe you'd like to see the medal that Congress sent me for having refused to haul down the flag. No? Oh, well, I kinder forgot you was a Reb when I was telling my yarn. West Point man, too, wasn't you? Well, 'tain't for a poor blue-jacket to talk to an officer, even if he ain't nothing but a soger."

The old sailor rose, and indignantly made for the gallery, his patriotic ardor being evidently too strong for him to endure the supercilious contempt of the young Confederate officer.

At this point I seemed to myself to have passed the limit of quiet endurance. At all events I opened my eyes and managed to say audibly, "Hurrah for you, Conway! Hurrah for Miss Armstrong! Hurrah for the old flag!"

"Hallo," cried Tolliver, forgetting his secesh allegiance in an instant. "You have done it now, Conway. The doctor has said all along that he might come out of it with a jump."

Conway raised my head, and between them they gave me a drink of something that set me up wonderfully, and by the time that the girls returned from their walk I was enough myself to be congratulated, and to receive Wag's ecstatic caresses with some degree of appreciation. I could not, however, but become aware of a certain atmosphere of constraint in the manner of my three Rebel companions, and spending most of the time, as I necessarily did, in keeping perfectly still, I studied it out after a while, remembering what I had previously overheard, that they looked upon me as the possible slayer of their brother and cousin, Lieutenant Gordon. What more natural than that they should feel a certain suspicious aversion under the circumstances.

Next day, after a good night's sleep and before the young ladies had appeared from their own quarters, I called Tolliver over to my bedside.

"Why are your sister and Miss Gordon in mourning, Tolliver?"

"Why, several of our near kin have been killed," said he, sadly; "nearly all Southern women are in black now."

"Do they — do you know anything about Gordon?"

"Yes — that is, we guess more than we actually know. He and his men simply disappeared, and we heard from some British sailors that they were taken by a party from a Yankee gunboat, and that Haines was killed. Can you tell us anything about it?"

"Yes, I can tell you all about it and about him. Sit down, won't you? It makes me tired to see you standing on that bandaged leg of yours." He swung across the room on his crutches, and returned with a camp-stool.

"One moment," said I, "before you sit down. Are those my cap and tunic hanging there in the corner? Please bring them here." He complied, laying them beside me, and I satisfied myself that they were in fact mine.

"Tolliver," I continued, "I did not shoot Haines; one of the men of my party did it. Do you see that patch along the band of my cap?" I held it up and he looked critically at it. "That covers the score that Haines's bullet made. It raised a welt along the side of my head. Pretty close call, you see. Haines was always handy with his gun." Tolliver examined the patch with undisguised appreciation.

At this point I heard a little dismayed exclamation behind me. The two girls had entered through the

open gallery window and had caught my last words. I had intended to get through with my story before they came, for I thought it would be easier to tell it to a man and a soldier than to poor Gordon's sister and sweetheart. I said as much when they came round and stood in front where I could see them.

"I'm sorry," I said, "that you came before I had finished telling my story to Captain Tolliver. I am not sure that I can get through it at all with you looking at me that way. But I'll try, if you like." So with sundry pauses and interruptions, I managed to tell them how Gordon met his death. They listening for the most part in tearful silence. It was a painful ordeal for me as well as for them, and I was pretty well done up after it was over; but there remained yet one thing more that I must needs do, one duty that I must in honor discharge.

"Would you mind," I said to Tolliver, "letting me speak with your sister a moment? I have a message for her." The captain and Edith went out upon the gallery, and Miss Helen drew nearer, for my voice was rather feeble. I reached for my tunic, and finding the special pocket that I had made, managed to extract from it with a rather shaky hand the little deerskin bag that had lain there for two months and more.

"Just at the end, Miss Tolliver, he asked me to bring him a certain package of letters that I had found among his effects; he charged me to give

them to you, when I could, and he died with them laid against his cheek. One of the last things he did was to look at this locket and hand it back to me. I was afraid to leave it with my other things lest it should be lost or stolen, so I have carried it with me ever since. You shall have the letters as soon as I can get them."

She had her handkerchief pressed to her eyes as I finished, and did not at first see that I was holding the locket out toward her. I had to speak again. "Here it is, Miss Tolliver," and I laid it in her hand. Then she went away sobbing, and I closed my eyes wearily, thankful enough that I had gotten through it all so well.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

Concerning those days of convalescence I have little to say, save that when I was fairly on my feet again I seemed to be in a veritable nautical paradise on shore. The quarters were clean, cool, and roomy, very different from the cramped closets aboard ship; the surroundings were beautiful, and everybody was extremely good to the wounded sailor-boy. By the latter part of September I was fast recovering strength, as I had long since recovered health and spirits.

Tolliver's wound was slower in healing, as he had sustained more actual physical damage, so, as he had become a favorite with the officers, his prolonged stay was favored, especially as he furnished an ostensible excuse for retaining the society of two very attractive but very unreconstructed little Rebels who were quite an addition to the circle of official society. Military matters were now so well in hand along the Gulf coast that many Federal officers had their families come down from the North, so that the esplanade was quite gay with promenaders in the cool of the afternoon, and as there were always

a number of ships in port, there was a large surplus of handsome young fellows in uniforms ready for escort duty.

I often thanked my stars that brothers by a mysterious dispensation are always prone to neglect their own sisters when other girls are at hand. Consequently, in our convalescent walks under the live oaks and among the pines, it always happened somehow that Miss Helen and I found ourselves forsaken by Captain Tolliver and Miss Edith, an arrangement to which I had not the slightest objection, for we had all become very excellent friends in spite of our patriotic antipathies. Indeed, since I had been able to show them that Gordon had met his death as a gallant soldier and in the fortune of war, they seemed to have altogether dismissed the suspicion that had so lately threatened to cloud our friendship.

Both the girls cherished a desire to visit Gordon's grave, as well for the sake of identifying the locality as because of a natural and praiseworthy sentiment prompting them to pay a final tribute to his memory by a visit to his resting-place.

It seemed that I was the only survivor of the expedition who could find the place, the others were all killed or scattered; and while, of course, my services as a guide were ever at their disposal, no opportunity for going seemed to offer.

St. Jude's Island was practically neutral ground.

Parties sometimes landed upon it from our gunboats, and again scouts were sent over by the Confederates from the mainland. Such a visit was not a matter of sufficient consequence to justify official interference; but you may always trust a woman's wit to overcome difficulties that concern her heart's desire. Arrangements had been made for Tolliver's exchange, since he would not be fit for active military duty for some time to come, and besides the official correspondence that had passed, numerous private letters had, to my certain knowledge, been smuggled through the lines concerning other affairs.

My Rebel friends, as the reader has probably inferred, were very high up in the Confederate social scale, and could exert no end of personal influence with the authorities; so at last there came an official communication formally delivered under a flag of truce at the picket-line, offering a safeguard for me if I could be permitted to "accompany Captain Tolliver to identify the grave of the late Lieutenant Gordon, C. S. A., killed in action on St. Jude's Island during an engagement in May last."

The commandant of the navy yard and of the United States forces at Pensacola consulted over the matter, but their objections disappeared after the petitioners had presented their case in a personal visit to headquarters. They always had their way, these girls, when they set about it.

On a certain lovely morning in October our party

embarked on the navy-yard tug, flying a flag of truce, and steamed off down through Santa Rosa Sound to meet a Confederate steamer at a point some miles beyond our lines. In due time we met a little stern wheeler with a white flag forward, and the Confederate ensign at her jackstaff. A safeguard for me was duly signed by the officer in command, and delivered to the captain of the tug. We were all transferred aboard and headed for St. Jude's Island, nearly a day's run to the eastward.

It was not without a certain pleasurable excitement for me, this authorized expedition under the Rebel flag. The guard on board the boat consisted of cadets from a military school in Alabama, whose regular sessions had been broken up by the exigencies of war. The boys were too young for active service in the army, but could be made very useful as guards and escorts, and the chief trouble in managing them was that they were all so very anxious for a fight, that it was difficult to restrain them within the bounds of common military courtesy.

They were dressed in neat uniforms, not unlike those of our own West Point cadets, and upon the whole were a very nice, clean, and orderly set of fellows, very different from the ordinary rank and file of the Confederate service.

They looked upon me with suspicious eyes and lowering brows, at first, I being probably the first Yankee in uniform that they had ever laid eyes

upon; but we were fairly good friends before the voyage was over.

Of course, the whole expedition was shadowed with sadness for my special party of three; but the immediate bitterness of their grief had in a degree passed away since the first bereavement, and their undisguised pleasure at being once more under the flag of their beloved Confederacy lent color to their cheeks and light to their eyes. Poor things! they little realized how hopeless was the case of that same Confederacy, and how, within a few weeks, the cause which they loved so much would be only a memory.

The sun was declining when we landed from the steamer in a little skiff just where my burial party had gone ashore three months before. I went ahead silently, and had little trouble in striking the trail that led off through the hammock toward the head of the cove. When I sighted the well-remembered palmetto raising its crown above the undergrowth, I bade my companions halt a moment while I went forward to reconnoitre, fearing lest the humble mound might have been disturbed and perhaps rifled by marauders. But no, it lay there just as I had left it, and the carved inscription on the bark of the palmetto was clear and legible, though kindly weather stained by its months of exposure to the summer sun. Motioning my friends to draw near, I went on a little distance up the trail and sat down upon a fallen log, leaving them with their dead.

After what seemed to me a long, long time, I heard footsteps approaching, and presently Tolliver and Edith strolled by quite oblivious of me, for I was a little withdrawn from the open trail, and quite possibly they would not have seen me even had I been in plainer view. They passed on out of sight, and I sat still for a few moments awaiting their return. Then thinking that Miss Helen had probably gone back to the steamer, I wandered again to Gordon's resting-place, only to find her seated at the foot of the tree, framing a cross to lay upon the grave.

I turned to withdraw by the way I came, but she saw and called to me to join her, motioning me to sit down on the opposite side of the little mound, where I watched her slender fingers deftly winding the gray Spanish moss about the rude little frame that she had put together.

"Jack," she said, after some moments of silence; "he used to call you Jack in the old days, didn't he? Jack, you have been very good to me — to us, and to him. A Southern girl asks God to go with you. I want to give you something to remember him by, to remember us. You must not look at it until after we are gone."

She reached across the low mound, and handed me a little package; then she hastily rose and went quickly down the trail toward the beach, leaving with me the little package that I was in honor bound